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APOSTOLIC TIMES



APOSTOLIC TIMES

AND

THEIR LESSONS.

APOSTOLIC TIMES
AND
THEIR LESSONS;
OR,
Plain, Practical Readings
FROM
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

BY
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Vicar of Chilham,
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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INTRODUCTORY.

I HAVE wished in this book to furnish some little help towards the profitable reading of a most blessed part of God's own Book; and specially with a view to Family Worship. Perhaps what I have written may form a kind of sequel to 'Light in the Dwelling,' and other works of a similar character.

I have endeavoured to arrange each portion, so that it should only take five minutes, or sometimes perhaps a little more, to read it aloud; and I have sought to leave on the memory one or two practical lessons drawn from each passage.

I have not attempted anything critical: that I leave to others. I have sought help wherever I could find it; and thankfully acknowledge my obligations to Bishop Wordsworth, Dean Goulburn, Dr. Vaughan, and Dean Howson (Conybeare and Howson); as well as to Calvin, Bengel, Hammond, and others.

If I have written anything wrong may God forgive it; if anything true and scriptural, may He bless it to the edification of the reader and hearer for Christ's sake! May He, in good George Herbert's words,—

'Turn their eyes hither, who shall make a gain;
Theirs, who shall hurt themselves or me, refrain.'

C. H. R.

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APOSTOLIC TIMES

AND

THEIR LESSONS.

ACTS, i. 1-5.

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen :

3 To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God :

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water : but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

IN commencing our reading of this most interesting part of God's word, it may be useful first to say a few words about the book itself, its author, and the object with which it was written.

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There is no question that the book called 'The Acts of the Apostles' was written by St. Luke. It is indeed the second part or volume of one work. Both parts are addressed to, and written for the instruction of, a friend or disciple named Theophilus. The first part, the Gospel, tells of 'all that Jesus *began* to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up;' and the second part, the Acts of the Apostles, tells of all that Jesus *continued* to do for His Church, when exalted to the right hand of the Father, in sending down His promised Spirit, calling out, guiding and strengthening His appointed messengers, and providing for the extension of His kingdom.

And there is one thing which comes out plainly in this book. Whilst the Gospels chiefly tell of the ministry, the sufferings, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Acts of the Apostles tell us chiefly of the work of God the Holy Ghost. So that whilst we may rightly speak of St. Luke's first treatise as 'the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,' *i.e.*, 'good news about Christ,' we may quite as properly speak of his second treatise, the Acts of the Apostles, as 'the Gospel of the Holy Ghost,' or 'good news about the Spirit.'

May that great and blessed Spirit about whom this book says so much guide us, whilst we go through it, into all truth, and make the reading of it very profitable to our souls!

St. Luke begins by reminding Theophilus of what was the subject of his former treatise. '*All that Jesus began to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up.*' When we think how short our Lord's life on earth was, and especially what a small part of it, three years only, was spent in public, it is perfectly wonderful what a vast amount of good He did, and what a mass of instruction was contained in what He taught. Jesus never lost a day or wasted an hour. Teaching, healing, doing good to sinners, and suffering on their behalf, all this went on up to 'the day in which He was taken up.'

One of the last things which the blessed Saviour did was, to '*give commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen.*' This, says St. Luke, He did '*through the Holy Ghost.*' He received not the Spirit 'by measure;' but *without* measure,—abundantly,—was He anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor. 'In the power of the Spirit,' He wrought mighty miracles. 'Filled with the Spirit,' He gave His last commission to the apostles, breathing on them, and saying, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' The last words of Jesus ere He left the world, His last commandments, His last commission, the things which He spake after His resurrection pertaining to the kingdom of God,—how interesting would it be to us to have a fuller record of them! But if He did many signs, and spoke many words, which are *not*

written in the book of God, enough is written 'that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through His name.' We may well be then content and thankful. Only when we read about the works and words of Christ, let this feeling be always present with us,—all that He did He did for *me*,—all that He spoke once He speaks again and again to *me*.

'*To whom,*' i.e., the apostles, '*also He showed Himself alive after His passion (or suffering, as the word means) by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days.*' Our Lord condescended to remain on earth after His resurrection for forty days, that He might give full and clear evidence of His resurrection, that He might by occasionally withdrawing Himself from His disciples gradually prepare them for His final departure, that, '*speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,*' He might instruct them for their work as preachers of the Gospel. During this time '*by many infallible proofs He showed Himself alive.*' We read of eleven different appearances of the risen Saviour, but there were very probably others which the Holy Spirit has not thought it needful to record. And we know that more than sixty years after He rose, He appeared in His risen and glorified body to His aged and beloved apostle John, saying, 'I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.' (Rev. i. 18.)

'And being assembled together with them;' in the margin it is *'eating together with them.'* It may be that this eating was no common eating, but that once again Jesus celebrated with His chosen friends that holy supper, which He had appointed to take the place of the passover. If so, what a fit and solemn preparation was it for His departure!

Jesus commanded His disciples to *wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of me.* By *'the promise of the Father'* He meant the Holy Ghost, with which he added, *'ye shall be baptized not many days hence.'* He had promised concerning that Spirit that the Father would send Him down, or that He Himself (being one with the Father) would send Him. We find the promise again and again repeated in different words in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of St. John's Gospel. The work of the Holy Spirit being of course a spiritual work, a secret work—(secret in its operation, manifest in its effects),—a gradual work, it was needful that some outward sign should mark the time when Christ's promise began to be fulfilled. Hence then the baptism by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the rushing wind, the cloven tongues, the power to speak in languages unknown before.

'Wait for the promise of the Father.' There are three great promises in the Bible with which all the

6 *Promise of Christ's Second Coming.*

'exceeding great and precious promises' of the Gospel are more or less connected, viz.,—

The promise of Christ's first coming.

The promise of the Holy Spirit.

The promise of Christ's second coming.

The first great promise, that of Christ's first coming, was fulfilled more than eighteen hundred years back. The promise of the Holy Spirit began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, and is in course of fulfilment still; and it will go on being fulfilled until the third great promise is made good by the appearing of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the promise of the Spirit shall be finally closed; no more of His renewing, quickening work shall be done then, for the door shall be shut, no more of His comforting work for those who are 'with Jesus' shall need comfort no more. Meanwhile we 'wait for the promise' of Christ's appearing, and let us always remember that it is only by having the promise of the Spirit fulfilled *in* us and *for* us, only by having our hearts renewed and sanctified by Him, that we can have 'confidence,' and not be afraid and ashamed when the Lord comes.

ACTS, i. 6-8.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

‘When they therefore were come together,’—the words seem to imply that the apostles came together to Jesus having agreed to ask Him a question of much interest to them. That question was, *‘Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?’* They were even yet, notwithstanding all that had happened, and all that Christ had taught them, clinging to some notion of an earthly kingdom in which they should have, as they hoped, high stations and authority. They seemed to have forgotten our Lord’s answer to the mother of the sons

of Zebedee, when she came asking that her sons might sit on His right hand and His left hand in His kingdom. They forget what Jesus had said of a baptism of shame, and suffering, and blood, which must be past through. They hoped that the time had come when their Master would proclaim Himself to be the Messiah, and as such would set His country free from subjection to the Roman power, and give His followers high places in His kingdom. The answer of our Lord to these inquiring disciples is very full of instruction. '*He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.*' The knowledge which they desired was not necessary for them, if it had been it would have been given them. The Father had put and kept in His own hand, His own power, the appointment of times and seasons, and the knowledge of such appointment.

The words of Christ to His disciples plainly rebuke those who venture to speak *too confidently* about the future, to *fix* the time of Christ's second coming, to say exactly *how* and *when* events shall happen, which God has purposely and wisely kept hidden from us. Of course we *may* and we *ought* to mark 'the signs of the times,' and to study that 'testimony of Jesus' which 'the spirit of prophecy' gives. But to speak positively about things which God does not see fit to reveal, is rash and presumptuous. It is not for us to know exactly the time

of Christ's coming; the great *truth* told us about it is, that 'the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night,' and the great *duty* pressed upon us is to watch, and be ready like the wise virgins with oil in our lamps to meet the bridegroom.

After gently reproving the curiosity of His disciples, Jesus went on to renew to them His promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, and to point out to them their present work and duty. '*Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.*' As if He had said, 'You need not busy yourselves about things which the Father does not see fit to make known to you, or inquire vainly about future events. You have a great work to do, to bear witness of me, and for this work you shall shortly be fitted by the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and remaining with you.'

'*Witnesses unto me.*' Before He had died Jesus had used these words or similar ones. For speaking of the work of the Holy Ghost in witnessing of Him He had added, 'And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.' (John, xv. 27.)

And as if the parting words of their Master had been deeply impressed upon the minds of His disciples, we find that, after He had left them, they

continually made use of such expressions as 'to witness,'—'to bear witness,'—'witnesses,'—when speaking of their work of preaching the Gospel. Thus in this very chapter St. Peter says (v. 22), that one must be chosen in the place of the traitor Judas to be *a witness* with them of *Christ's resurrection*. In chapter iv. St. Luke speaks of the apostles giving with great power *witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus*. St. John in his Gospel speaks of John the Baptist's coming for *a witness*, to *bear witness* of Christ the Light. Whilst in his first epistle, in very strong and plain words, he speaks of his office as *a witness* sent to testify that which he had seen, and heard, and handled, of the word of life.

Witnesses for Christ,—what a high and important office! What ought a witness to speak? 'The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' And if this be the work and duty, not of the apostles only, but of all Christ's ministers to the end of time, ought we not to pray for them that God would make them faithful witnesses, testifying truly, fully, and faithfully, the Gospel of the grace of God?

Besides, however, testifying of Christ with their lips, there was another way in which the apostles (most of them at least) were to bear witness; *i.e.*, by suffering for their Master's sake. The same word means both 'a witness' and 'a martyr.' So that

when we say, 'The noble army of martyrs praise Thee,' we might quite as well say, 'The noble army of witnesses praise Thee;' witnesses, *i.e.*, who have sealed their testimony with their blood. In this sense how true was it that the apostles to whom Jesus spoke should be witnesses for Him! For all of them but John (who suffered a long and lonely banishment) died violent deaths for Christ's sake.

But what about ourselves? Very few of us are called to witness for Christ in the sense of preaching the Gospel; fewer still, thank God, are called to the terrible trial of a martyr's death. But *all* of us, high and low, young and old, who name the name of Christ, are called to be witnesses for Him.

And it is the witness of the life, and not of the lips only, that is wanted. A rich man may witness for Christ by liberally supporting Christ's cause, and helping to spread the knowledge of Him, and by ministering to the wants of Christ's needy brethren. A poor man may witness for Christ by contentment, and thankfulness, and trust in God's Providence. A child may witness for Christ by gentleness, obedience, kindness, humility. A master may witness for Christ by giving his servants that which is just and equal. A servant may witness for Christ by doing his work faithfully, 'not with eye-service as a man-pleaser,' but as the servant of Christ!

Oh, that thus in our different stations we may all

be witnesses for Christ! Only in order to be this, we must seek to know for our own selves the Saviour's grace and love, so that we may be able to bear witness of that which we have known, and felt, and tasted, of that Saviour's preciousness.

ACTS, i. 9-11.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel :

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

THE very greatest event that ever happened in this world's history — the visit and sojourn in it for three-and-thirty years of its Creator in the form of one of His creatures,—how little was there about it in its opening and its close to attract attention and awake astonishment ! How quietly Jesus came, and how quietly He went away ! When He was born in Bethlehem, it is true angels proclaimed the wonderful event, but only to a few simple shepherds. The world, in general, heard not the songs of the heavenly host, and heeded not the great mystery about which they sang. And so, too, when Jesus had finished His great work and went back again to the glory of the Father, only a little company of faithful disciples watched His departure.

In his Gospel St. Luke tells us that Jesus had led His disciples forth as far as Bethany, and that it was whilst He was in the very act of lifting up His hands and blessing them that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. His last words were words of love and promise ; His last act was to bless them. He was still solemnly blessing them when slowly He began to rise. Earth had lost its power to keep Him. His work being now done heaven once more claimed Him. He rose upwards, still as He rose looking with love upon the companions of His earthly life, and stretching out His arms over them in the attitude of blessing.

Awe-struck the disciples gazed with straining eyes, as His body lessened to their view, until a cloud (such as had come down at His transfiguration on Mount Tabor) came and hid Him from their sight. From this time all communication between Christ and His followers ceased, except such as could be carried on by faith and prayer.

But though all was so still, and there were no thunders and lightnings as when God came down on Sinai, no chariot and horses of fire ; nothing to disturb the last intercourse between Jesus and His friends, the words of the prophetic Psalmist give us a hint of what took place far above the clouds,—far out of human sight. There evidently the glory of the ascending Saviour broke forth to view, and He was seen leading captivity captive, triumphing over

His enemies, and making a 'show of them openly. And the chariots of God, even thousands of angels, thronged around Him, and sang, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in.' (Ps. xxiv.)

It was whilst the disciples were eagerly trying to follow their Master in His upward flight, that '*two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*'

It seems as if the disciples had been so entirely absorbed with the wonderful sight of their Master going up to heaven, that they did not notice the presence of the angels until they heard their voice. Perhaps these were the very two angels who had watched by our Lord's forsaken tomb. Perhaps one of them had strengthened Him in His agony in the garden. And now they came to say to the disciples whom He had just left, '*Why stand ye gazing up into heaven as if you had lost your all? as if you should see your Master no more? He is but gone from you for a little while. You have seen His departure, now wait for His return. He shall so come again, as ye have seen Him go.*'

'So come.' It would be so in some respects, but in others very differently. Jesus went up in His

16 *Consequences of Christ's Ascension.*

resurrection-body, in that same body He shall return. A cloud received Him as He went up, with clouds shall He come again. It shall be the same 'man Christ Jesus,' who walked, and talked, and healed by the Sea of Galilee, and in the streets of Jerusalem. But it shall not be quietly, privately, before a little handful of friends that He shall come again; but with power and great glory, with an innumerable company of angels, with flaming fire, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.

Now by the glorious ascension of Christ our Lord into heaven, *our faith is confirmed and strengthened.* For we know certainly, that He in whom we believe came forth from the Father, since He is received of the Father. The Father sent Him into the world and we have received His message, and we know that it is the message which He was sent to deliver, since having delivered it He is so highly exalted of the Father.

Our hope, too, is confirmed by Christ's ascension. Naturally it might seem to us impossible that these mortal bodies of ours should be taken up into heaven. But now since our human nature has gone up thither in the person of Christ, we may well (if His disciples) hope to follow Him.

Further, upon Christ's ascension depended, as He said Himself, *the coming down of the Holy Ghost the Comforter.* We may not understand all the reasons

why the Holy Spirit could not come down in all His fulness until Christ departed ; but certainly after what our Lord said we cannot doubt that so it was. And if we only think for a moment what we owe to the Holy Spirit, how He inspired apostles and evangelists to write the Scriptures, how He fitted for their work the first preachers of the Gospel, and makes men in these days faithful ministers of the New Testament, how He renews, enlightens, sanctifies, comforts, we may see how needful was that ascension of Christ which must go before the bestowing of such a precious gift.

And now, whilst Christ our risen Saviour intercedes for us above,—whilst He prepares a place for His people,—whilst He tenderly sympathises with them and evermore defends them,—may our hearts and affections rise to Him until we are ourselves with Him in glory !

ACTS, i. 12-14.

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

'THEN returned they unto Jerusalem.' Then just when they had seen the last of their Divine Master, and had been bidden by the angels to gaze no more idly up to the heaven which He had entered, but to go and wait for His return. After the last look, the last words of blessing, they returned to Jerusalem. So had Jesus bidden them.

And yet we should have thought that Jerusalem was the last place that they would wish to go to. There their Master had been put to death, were His servants likely to meet with better treatment? It would not have been strange if the disciples had fled away, and been separated and scattered to dis-

tant homes. But faith makes men bold. In his Gospel St. Luke tells us that as soon as the disciples lost sight of Jesus, when He went up to heaven, they fell down and worshipped Him. Faith began its work at once. And faith gave them strength and courage to obey their Master's bidding, although to go to Jerusalem was like sheep going into the midst of wolves.

Indeed it was not only with good courage that they went to Jerusalem ; St. Luke says that they returned thither '*with great joy.*' (Luke, xxiv. 52.) When Jesus first spoke of going away 'sorrow filled their hearts.' But now when He actually left them they showed great joy. Was there any want of love in this ? Far from it. They never loved their Master more than when they lost Him. But their joy was the fruit of strengthened faith and increased knowledge. Jesus had opened their understandings, and explained to them the Scriptures. They now saw that though He was leaving them as to His *bodily* presence, He would be *spiritually* ever with them ; that their loss was His gain, for that He left them to go up to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was ; indeed, that which *seemed* to them *loss* was real *gain*, for that it was expedient that He should go that the Comforter might come. So faith made them brave and happy, when we might have expected them to be timid and sorrowful. May the Lord increase our faith, so that

loving a Saviour 'whom we have not seen,' we may, 'believing in Him, rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!'

When the apostles had returned to Jerusalem they went into an upper room (perhaps the very one where Jesus had eaten with them the last Pass-over), and '*all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.*' We must remember that Christ had given them a plain promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were waiting for the fulfilment of that promise. They were in daily expectation of it. But they did not think that this made it needless for them to pray. Promises are not meant to keep us from praying, but to encourage us to pray. After a chapter full of blessed Gospel promises, God says, by the prophet Ezekiel, 'Yet for all this will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.' (Ezek. xxxvi. 37).

'*They continued in prayer.*' 'Persevered' in it, as the word means, — were unceasing and importunate. And this they did '*with one accord.*' Their Master had said that if two of them agreed in anything that they asked, it should be done for them by His Father in heaven. Here then were more than two or three with one mind and one mouth agreeing to ask for the gift of the Spirit, so graciously promised by the Saviour who had just left them. We too should plead God's promises with Him, — plead them each for ourselves, — plead them together, praying

that He would give us pardon and peace, grace and strength, according to *our* need and *His* promises.

Along with the apostles are mentioned '*the women*,' as joining with them in prayer and supplication. It is not said who these women were; but all through our Lord's life it is remarkable how often women are spoken of as ministering in some way to Him. In Martha's house at Bethany Jesus was ever a welcome guest, and whilst Martha served Mary sat at His feet to learn. We read of 'certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others which also ministered unto Him of their substance,' going about with Jesus, when He went throughout every city and village preaching the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. In the week before our Lord's death, two women on different occasions anointed His head and feet with ointment, thus proving their love and anointing Him (as He said) for His burial. Women were the last at His cross and the first at His tomb. What a blessed thing it would be if women in these days were more ready to follow such good examples! They cannot indeed minister to the Lord Himself of their substance, or spread the table for Him, or anoint His feet, or prepare spices with which to embalm His sacred body. But women who love Christ may still minister

to Him by visiting the fatherless and widows, the sick and needy in their affliction, guiding the wandering, instructing the ignorant, feeding the lambs of His flock. And it can hardly be wrong to say that the woman who does nothing of this kind, but ‘lives in pleasure,’—lives only for herself,—would, if she had lived in our Lord’s days, have passed Him by in the streets of Nazareth and Capernaum, and have shown Him no kindness.

There is one name in the list of that praying company which calls for particular notice, it is that of ‘*Mary, the mother of Jesus.*’ And how beautiful it is to see that holy woman not shutting herself up to brood over her own private grief, but relying on the promise of her mysterious Son, and joining with His friends and followers in praying for its accomplishment.

This is the last time that the Virgin Mary is named in the Bible. The last sight which we catch of that favoured woman is when on her knees. Let us give her all due honour, but never dare to put her in the place of Him of whom she herself said, ‘My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.’

ACTS, i. 15-20.

15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty),

16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem: insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Acedama, that is to say, The field of blood.

20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

In these verses we see a beginning made in the work of organising the Church; the first steps taken towards bringing the little company of Christians into some settled form and order.

By the treachery and death of Judas a gap had

been made in the number of the apostles, and Peter (taught by the Holy Spirit) speaks of the way in which that gap must be filled up. First, however, he briefly recalls the history and the wretched end of the traitor. He tells of his high position of privilege. *'He was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.'* 'Have not I chosen you twelve,' said Jesus, 'and one of you is a devil?' How much had Judas seen and heard of what was wonderful and holy, good and gracious, during the three years in which he had kept company with our Lord and his brother apostles! He had had ever before him the most perfect example. He had heard words of wondrous wisdom and love spoken by Him who spake as never man spake. He had seen mighty miracles wrought. And doubtless Judas was one who could say, as our Lord represents some saying at last, 'Have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' and yet it should be said to them, 'I never knew you.'

All through his companionship with Christ, Judas had been cherishing one great bosom sin. 'He was a thief.' He carried the purse which contained the common store of the little company made up of Christ and His disciples. He carried it, and pilfered from it. No doubt other sins went along with this, for no sin goes alone. But one cherished

sin is like a canker-worm that eats out the very life of all religion. O sad and solemn warning which the history of Judas presents! No man had greater privileges, no man made a worse use of them.

'He was guide to them that took Jesus.' There was another Judas amongst the apostles; a man of faith, and prayer, and holiness, as his epistle clearly shows. His name must not be in any way confused with that of the traitor. Therefore whenever Judas Iscariot is mentioned, it is almost always added to his everlasting disgrace, 'which also betrayed him;' 'which also was the traitor.' Judas knew well our Lord's person and His haunts, and used his intimate acquaintance with the Holy One and Just, to 'guide' those who sought to slay Him.

It is possible Judas may have thought that our Lord would assert His power, and proclaim Himself as the Messiah. It seems like it, for when he saw that Jesus did not do this, but that He allowed Himself to be seized and condemned, he was filled with fear and remorse, and said, 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.'

But whatever may have been the man's motive his act was one of most horrible wickedness. For a paltry bribe (the price fixed under the Levitical law as a fine for the accidental killing of a bond-servant) Judas sold his Master.

When he got what he bargained for, it seemed

as if the ill-gotten money were like fire in his hands. 'He cast it down in the temple and went and hanged himself.' It is said that '*he purchased a field with the reward of his iniquity.*' He did not of course purchase it himself, for it was not until after his death that it was bought by the chief priests, but he was the cause of its being bought. The field was bought for a very trifling sum, less than five pounds of our money. No doubt the price was so low because of its being polluted by the horrible death of Judas, on account of which it could only be applied to an unclean use, as a burial-place for strangers and heathens.

In all that took place with reference to the treachery and death of Judas, St. Peter says there was a fulfilment of an ancient prophecy. As David was a type of Christ, so Ahithophel, who was David's friend and turned treacherously against him, was a type of Judas the traitor. Each of these two hanged himself. '*All the dwellers at Jerusalem knew*' of the awful end of Judas. And we, long ages after he lived and died, seem to see him held up before us, gibbeted as criminals were in old times, for our instruction and warning.

Let us learn from his story, 1st, How little effect in themselves great privileges have in softening and sanctifying the heart; 2nd, How fearfully hardening is any besetting sin cherished, excused, clung to;

Lessons from the Story of Judas. . 27

3rd, How easy it is in the midst of light to walk on in darkness. Let us pray that we may be in heart and life the true disciples of Christ; that He would hold us up and lead us on, and bring us safely to His heavenly kingdom.

ACTS, i. 21-26.

21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen,

25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

IN three of his Psalms (viz., 41st, 69th, and 109th), David had spoken prophetically of the treachery of Judas. The same prophecy which spoke of the fall of Judas, spoke also of another taking his vacant office and apostleship. So then, said Peter, one must be appointed to fill up the gap made by the false apostle's fall, and to be a witness of Christ's resurrection.

The new apostle must be one who had accom-

panied Jesus through the whole course of His ministry. From first to last he must have been a witness of the Saviour's life on earth, beginning from the baptism of John until the time that He was taken up to heaven. One who had followed Jesus,—seen His miracles, heard His words, watched the whole course of His spotless life,—such an one only could with power and authority give his testimony to the truth of the Lord's resurrection.

The disciples acted according to St. Peter's counsel. From amongst their number they chose out two who had been throughout the companions of Christ,—Joseph called Barsabas, and Matthias. And then they lifted up their prayers to Him who had promised to be with them even to the end of the world, imploring Him who knew the hearts of all, and knew therefore which was fittest for the work, to show which of these two men He chose for the vacant office. Having thus prayed '*they gave forth their lots.*' Solomon says, 'The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.' The prayer then for guidance was answered, by the lot falling upon Matthias, who was henceforth numbered with the eleven apostles.

In St. Peter's reference to Judas he uses a remarkable expression about him, which it may be instructive for us particularly to notice. He says that when Judas by transgression fell from his apostleship he went '*to his own place;*' the place

suitable for him, proper to him, natural to him ; the place for which he had long been ripening and preparing. What that place was we cannot doubt. Our Lord Himself called him 'a devil,' a 'son of perdition;' and we know where the home of such is.

It may seem to us that the sin and punishment of Judas are little or nothing to us, since we could not act his part over again, and betray Christ into the hands of His enemies. But it is none the less true that on leaving this world each man goes '*to his own place*;' the true disciple of Christ goes to be with and like His Master ; the man of the world who has his portion in this life, the lover of sin, these go too to their own place, and that *is* not, *cannot* be, where Jesus reigns, and all is holiness and love. There is much here to keep sin and selfishness in check ; and much also to damp and deaden the Christian's faith and hope. But the seeds of heaven or hell are in us here, and what we have been gradually fitting for, to that as being '*our own place*' at last we go. In all God's works there is a fitness between the creature and the element in which it moves. For a fish its '*own place*' is the water ; for a bird the air ; for a beast the ground, on which it finds pasture. Just so in higher things. For a man who loves God his '*own place*' is God's blessed kingdom. For a man who loves sin, his '*own place*' is that abode of misery where 'sin being finished bringeth forth death.'

It is easy and common to talk of going to heaven ; but if we did go there would it be a happy place to us ? would it be in any way natural to us ? would it be that for which we had been through our life on earth preparing ? We may be sadly weak in faith, and have sadly little love to our Saviour Christ, but if there be no faith, no love, no pleasure taken in God's word and ways, what fitness is there for heaven ?

And let us put away all vain thoughts of a fitness for heaven which comes at death, or even after death. It is the business of a lifetime to be trained for heaven. Let this be our care, and this our constant prayer, that through the grace and love of Christ, and by the mighty working of God the Spirit, we may be made daily more and more 'meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

ACTS, ii. 1-11.

1 And when the day of Pentecost was come, they were all with one accord in one place.

2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans?

8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,

11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

'When the day of Pentecost was fully come.' The

feast of Pentecost began just fifty days after the chief day of the feast of the Passover. It was also called the 'Feast of Weeks,' and the 'Feast of First-fruits.' Why, we may ask, was this time chosen for the glorious descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church of Christ? There seem to have been several reasons for it.

1st. The Feast of Pentecost was the first great feast after the Passover. Vast numbers of people were gathered together at Jerusalem during the Passover; it is said as many sometimes as two millions and a half. As so many had seen or heard something of Christ's crucifixion, it was fit that there should be also a large gathering to witness the display of His power in the out-pouring of the Spirit according to His promise.

2nd. About this very time, long ages before, the law had been given from Mount Sinai. As that law, through the weakness of our mortal nature, had not been and could not be obeyed, it was fit that the new law,—'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,' as St. Paul calls it, should about the same time begin to be written by the finger of the Spirit 'on the fleshly tables of the heart.'

3rd. The Feast of First-fruits was a very fit time for that out-pouring of the Spirit, which was the cause of the first large and blessed ingathering of the spiritual harvest henceforth to be reaped.

The day of Pentecost was the first day of the

34 *The Descent of the Holy Ghost.*

week,—‘the Lord’s day,’—and the disciples were all ‘*with one accord in one place,*’ gathered together no doubt for public worship. On this day Jesus rose from the dead; on this day the Holy Spirit came down; on this day, in the work of creation, ‘God said, Let there be light, and there was light.’ Light, life, and love, were the gifts of the three persons of the sacred Trinity on this holy day to man.

As to the signs and tokens of the Spirit’s coming, there was,—

1st. ‘*A sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.*’ This would attract attention and awaken watchfulness for what should follow. When Elijah was on Horeb ‘a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind.’ It was different on the day of Pentecost. Then the Lord *was* in the wind. Not indeed that the wind, or the tongues of fire were in any sense the Spirit Himself. We must be careful not to think this for a moment. These were only *outward signs* of the mighty, secret work of the unseen Spirit. All the more that His work *is* secret, and that He deals invisibly with our hearts, all the more needful was it that some *outward* sign should mark His first glorious coming.

2nd. There were ‘*cloven tongues like as of fire.*’ Fire, as we know, is refining and purifying, and the fire seen was to represent the warming, refining, and

purifying work of the Holy Spirit. The cloven tongues resting on each were to show how each should be taught and qualified by the Spirit to testify with boldness, readiness, and fervour, the Gospel of the grace of God.

3rd. *'They began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.'* It is perfectly plain from what follows that it was not (as some have thought) that the apostles uttered strange supernatural sounds, such as needed special interpretation.

It is simply that being themselves, for the most part, 'unlearned and ignorant men,' they were enabled by the miraculous gift of the Spirit to preach the Gospel in languages which, if they could ever have learnt them at all, it would have taken them many years to learn, and speak with any readiness.

Christ had bidden them to 'preach the Gospel to every creature.' There was a great work to do, and it must be done quickly. They could not go to school whilst the world waited for the Gospel. So at once, by miracle, the confusion of tongues which began at Babel was remedied, and whilst the apostles could not themselves speak above one, or at most two languages, now Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and a host of other distant tribes and nations, heard them speak *'the wonderful works of God in their own tongues wherein they were born.'*

All this was a glorious beginning of that great work of preaching the Gospel, about which we read so much in the Acts of the Apostles. From this time forward we see the apostles filled with courage and power. Peter is no more rash or timid. John no more wishes to call down fire from heaven on those who will not receive his Master.

For ourselves, let us remember that the gift which began to be given on the day of Pentecost has never been recalled. Our Lord assured us that our heavenly Father is *more* ready 'to give the Holy Spirit to them than ask Him,' than earthly parents are to give good gifts unto their children.

We do not now look for, we do not need, the great signs which marked the first coming down of the Spirit; but we do greatly need that blessed Spirit's work *in* and *upon* our hearts.

' We ask not, Lord, Thy cloven flame,
Or tongues of various tone;
But long Thy praises to proclaim
With fervour in our own.'

Our Saviour has bidden us to 'ask and receive, that our joy may be full.'

ACTS, ii. 12-21.

12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this ?

13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words :

15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel :

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams :

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy :

19 And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke :

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come :

21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

‘ They were all amazed. ’ This was of course most likely,—most natural. Any of us would be amazed, if we heard poor men of no learning preaching in

languages which were perfectly new to them. Those multitudes who heard a little company of Galilæan fishermen preaching readily in more than a dozen different tongues, might well be filled with astonishment. And so, many of them, thoroughly perplexed, ran about the streets of Jerusalem saying one to another, '*What meaneth this?*' 'Have you seen these men? Have you heard them? How do they come by these strange gifts and powers? And what will it all end in?'

Others there were who made light of the whole thing. 'It is all imposture,' they said, 'all a piece of deception. These men are drunk; they are *full of new wine.*'

Now it is quite true that great signs like those witnessed on the day of Pentecost do not in these days accompany the Holy Spirit's work. But for all that, the Spirit works mightily and marvellously *now* as ever. And through His blessed working we see great and good changes taking place day by day amongst men,—changes which are little, if at all, short of miracles. We see the drunkard becoming sober; the passionate becoming gentle; the man who has been utterly careless about his soul beginning to read the Bible and pray. We see hearts warmed, hands opened, tongues bridled, tempers softened. And when such changes are seen, wrought as they are by the Holy Spirit, it is to imitate those mocking Jews of old to say as many do say of

those who are thus changed, 'It will not last; it is all hypocrisy; it is all done for gain.' We must be very careful lest, by joining those who speak thus, we wound weak consciences, and 'do despite to the Spirit of God.'

And now let us look at a part of Peter's sermon, — the first sermon preached since he and his companions received from Christ their solemn commission; a sermon remarkable for its boldness, plainness, and faithfulness, and still more for the wonderful effect which it produced in the conversion of three thousand souls.

Peter begins by refuting the charge brought against himself and his companions. He says, '*These are not drunken as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.*' The third hour of the day was nine o'clock in the morning; and it was well known that at such festivals as that which was then being celebrated, the Jews seldom tasted anything, much less wine, until noon. It would be impossible therefore to make a charge with less show of foundation for it. But how meekly and quietly does Peter meet the charge! There are few of us, it may be feared, who if charged with a shameful sin whilst trying to do good, would reply so patiently.

Having shown what these wonders which all were talking about were *not*, the apostle goes on to show what they *were*. He refers to a prophecy con-

tained in the book of Joel, and says that there was in all that had taken place a fulfilment of it. Now as to that prophecy there can be no doubt that, like similar prophecies in the Gospels, it has a double meaning and application. It applies, *first*, to the destruction of Jerusalem which was to happen, and *did* happen, about forty years after the time when Peter preached this sermon; and it applies, *secondly* and more fully, to that glorious coming of Christ for which we are waiting. Peter no doubt did not enter *fully* into the meaning of the prophecy to which he referred. He speaks in his first epistle of prophets of old time 'searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify.' And so with himself, he knew that the prophecy of Joel was receiving a partial fulfilment in the wonders of Pentecost; but it was not revealed to him how it should in after ages be more perfectly accomplished.

We must not wonder if we sometimes find in the Bible events which are separated by centuries spoken of together, in the compass of one or two verses. We must remember that God sees the end with the beginning. To Him all the world's history lies spread out like a map. He sees all at once. So in the prophecy of Joel two great events are spoken of together,—the destruction of Jerusalem and the coming of Christ. Before the former there was that out-pouring of the Spirit of which we have read in this chapter. Upon some of all flesh, men of dif-

ferent tribes and tongues God poured out His Spirit. Handmaidens, like the daughters of Philip the Evangelist, prophesied. As St. Paul says, 'To one was given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy.'

Even that part of Joel's prophecy which speaks of great signs and wonders, found half its accomplishment in those events which happened at the time of the siege of Jerusalem. Great signs, as testified by several historians, accompanied that terrible time. A fiery star, in shape like a sword, hung over the city for a year. A light shone in the temple and about the altar at night. The great and heavy gate of the temple opened of itself. A voice was heard from the most holy place of the temple, saying, 'Let us depart hence.' There were fearful sights in the sky as of armies contending.

But we cannot doubt that another, and more complete fulfilment of the prophecy, will take place before the Lord comes. Before that '*great and notable day*' there shall be a large out-pouring of the Spirit. Before that day there shall be 'distress of nations and perplexity;' and it is likely also great sights and signs in heaven and earth.

We wait for that day. Meanwhile St. Peter and St. Paul both take up and repeat the words of the prophet, 'Whosoever shall call upon the name

of the Lord shall be saved.' It is a large and free Gospel promise. It takes all in. Of course the calling does not mean a vain cry for mercy just at last when the door is shut. It is, as St. Paul clearly shows us (Rom. x.), a calling which consists in believing in Christ and confessing Him. 'Whosoever calls,' let him be ever so needy, so sinful, so helpless, he 'shall be saved.' 'Whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely.'

ACTS, ii. 22-36.

22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know :

23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain :

24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death : because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

25 For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved :

26 Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope :

27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

28 Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ;

31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ,

that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which he now see and hear.

34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

It is very interesting and instructive to notice and compare together the sermons, addresses, or more private teachings of the first preachers of the Gospel, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. We find discourses by Peter, Stephen, Philip the Evangelist, and Paul. And in the teaching of all these holy men we find a remarkable agreement. They all harp more or less on one string. They all dwell on one great subject. 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they say, 'lived, and taught, and wrought miracles amongst you. You by wicked hands crucified and slew Him; yet God raised Him from the dead, and we are witnesses of His resurrection. And now being exalted to the right hand of the Father, He hath shed forth the gift of the Holy Ghost; whilst through Him is preached unto you forgiveness of sins. And at His bidding this blessed doctrine will

be preached, until the time when the risen and ascended Saviour shall return as the appointed Judge of quick and dead.'

These are the great truths on which the first preachers of the Gospel love to dwell. They all alike speak of great facts,—but facts which are the very foundation of all true Christianity. If we have not the sermons recorded, still it is always the same as to what was the substance of them. Philip goes down to Samaria and 'preaches Christ' unto the people. Saul, as soon as he is converted, 'preaches Christ in the synagogues that He is the Son of God.' He reasons with the Jews of Thessalonica out of the Scriptures, 'opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.' Again, in the synagogue of Corinth, the same apostle 'pressed in the Spirit testifies to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.' Apollos, eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, speaks boldly in the synagogues of Achaia, 'mightily convincing the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.' Paul, as a prisoner at Rome, expounds to the Jews the Old Testament Scriptures, 'persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets from morning till evening.' It is still ever the same; Christ,—His work,—His death,—His resurrection,—His ascension,—the fulfilment of His

promise in the gift of the Holy Spirit,—and all the blessed fruits which flow from these great truths.

It is worthy of our notice, too, how continually those first preachers, like the greatest preacher of all, Christ Himself, referred to the Old Testament, and took texts for their sermons from it. Peter had several such texts in his sermon. One, as we have seen, taken from the prophecy of Joel, and two more taken from David's Psalms. These he shows to be fully accomplished in the resurrection and exaltation of Christ to the right hand of the Father, and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's sermon was wonderfully simple, and yet wonderfully efficacious. Never, that we know of, was there a sermon preached which produced such results,—even the conversion of three thousand souls. The ministers of Christ in these days have still the same things to tell as apostles told long ago. It is still the same dear 'old story;' but what a story! We do not want new things continually to entertain and astonish us. What we do want is, the *old* things believed, realised, felt, acted upon. We have still as ever the old story to tell of Jesus and His love; but it is the entrance of this story into our hearts, and not our ears only, that is wanted.

If any one of us were in a house that was on fire, and a friend dashed in amongst the burning ruins, and drew us forth when lying insensible, and yet

himself at the last moment fell, crushed to death by a burning beam; could we think of his courage, devotion, and self-sacrifice, without a throbbing heart and a tearful eye? Could the day of *our* rescue and of *his* death come round year by year without our remembering sadly, gratefully, lovingly, the man who lost his life in saving ours? Yet the love and self-sacrifice of the best and kindest of earthly friends are as nothing to the love of Jesus. Surely we should feel differently,—pray differently,—live differently, from what we do, if we kept ever fresh in our minds the thought, ‘My sins pierced Jesus, and His love alone saves me.’

May God the Holy Spirit bring the old things which we have known so long with new power to our hearts, so that we may deeply feel that we *are* the purchase, and *ought* to be the followers of Jesus of Nazareth!

ACTS, ii. 37-40.

37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked to their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ?

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

It is said of those who listened to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost that '*they were pricked to the heart.*' The word preached came home to their hearts with power, applied by God the Holy Spirit ; so that now for the first time they became convinced that they had been guilty of an awful sin in crucifying the Lord of glory. They saw also that they had committed that act of monstrous wickedness all in vain, for whilst it had loaded their souls with guilt, He whom their malice persecuted and slew was exalted to the right hand of the Father as Lord and Christ.

So then there was fulfilled in part that prophecy

of Zechariah (which is yet to be more completely accomplished), 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn.' They had, by the help of Gentile hands, pierced the Saviour, and now the arrow of conviction pierced them.

'They were pricked to the heart.' Perhaps our first feeling when we read this is, 'And no wonder; those savage, unjust, cruel murderers of the Prince of Life, well might they be pricked to the heart; good reason had they to cry out—"What shall we do?"' But *we* who name the name of Christ, and rank as His followers, why should *we* be pricked to the heart when we hear of Him?' Now St. Paul speaks of some who 'crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.' It is possible in heart and mind to join in denying and crucifying Christ, even though our hands may not have driven the nails which fastened Him to the cross, or our tongues have clamoured for His death. For suppose we make light of the purposes for which Christ died; suppose we cling to the sin from which He suffered to deliver us; and by our words and our example confirm others in sin. Is not this opposing Christ? Is not this joining with Jews and Romans in saying—'Away with this man! we do not want Him,—we will not have Him. Give us Barabbas the robber. Give us the sin that will destroy us, and not the Christ who would save us?'

And let us not forget that those who sin thus against the Lord Christ, do worse things than the Jews who gave Him to be crucified. For in their case there was much ignorance, an imperfect knowledge of the word of prophecy. They *might* have known, and *did* know indeed much more than the Romans, of whom, when they 'crucified the Lord of glory,' it might be most truly said that 'they knew not what they did.' Still their light was dim compared with ours. When *we* sin against Christ, we sin with our eyes wide open. We know all that the Saviour has done, and why He did it.

It would indeed be a blessed thing if there were more of such '*pricking of the heart*' as was seen on the day of Pentecost. St. Paul says of the Word of God that it is 'quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword.' So indeed it is, when the Spirit drives it home. A sight, by faith, of Christ's cross ought to be to all of us a humbling, a heart-piercing thing. *They* may well be '*pricked to the heart,*' who awake to the conviction that by their sins they have taken a part in crucifying the Saviour.

Those listening thousands on the day of Pentecost, troubled, terrified, filled with remorse and shame, cried out to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' When Saul of Tarsus was struck down in his course of mad persecution, his first inquiry was, 'Lord,

what wilt Thou have me to do ?' Feeling, anxiety, remorse, are good things. But sometimes, as with the stony-ground hearers, feelings however good do not last. It is then a step further in a right direction when any one, startled and convinced of sin, begins to ask, '*What must I do ?*' I see I am not right, not safe. I see I have sinned, how can I be forgiven ? How can I have peace with God ?

'*Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.*' When Jesus commenced His public ministry He called men to repentance, saying, 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent ye and believe the gospel.' And in giving His last charge to His disciples, Christ bade that 'repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' So that Peter was only obeying His Master's bidding, and following His example, when he said, 'Repent, and be baptized ;' 'Repent, and be converted.' We must always bear in mind, however, that true repentance is not merely sorrow for sin, or fear of its consequences, or shame at its detection. There were these in Saul king of Israel, and Ahab, and Judas Iscariot, and yet no true repentance. True repentance is a complete change of mind, leading to a change of conduct. Repentance of course *includes* sorrow for sin ; for a man cannot have new thoughts and feelings about

sin, and a new intention of fighting against it, without being sorry for it. But many earthly motives may make a man sorry for sin. Truly to repent is both to be sorry for sin and to forsake it.

‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus.’ There was to be sorrow for sin,—turning away from sin,—turning to Christ and trusting in Him; and then there must be the outward confession of Christ in the sacrament of baptism, the public acknowledgment in the face of all that might frown or ridicule, that they were followers of Jesus. And that sacrament, thus rightly received, would be to them an outward *sign* and seal of forgiveness, and they would further receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

We were baptized in our infancy; our public confession of Christ must then be made in Confirmation and the other sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. And some such confession there must be if our repentance and faith are to be shown to be real, for, as St. Paul says, ‘with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.’ *That* repentance cannot be genuine which leaves a man ashamed of confessing the Saviour, whilst he professes to be sorry for having slighted Him.

‘The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’ The promise of forgiveness; the

promise of the Spirit ; the promise of life. To you Jews,—to your children,—to Gentiles afar off,—to all to whom the Gospel comes,—is the promise made, the mercy offered. We have not the whole of Peter's sermon. '*With many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves (or rather, as the words really mean, Be saved) from this unto-ward generation.*' Peter was urgent and pressing. He did not speak smooth things. He felt the need and danger of those to whom he spoke, and knew that there was only one way of escape.

And do we not all feel the vast importance of these things when death and eternity seem drawing near ? When a few years back the ship 'London' was lost, we are told that amongst the two hundred that perished, whilst they were waiting in awful suspense for the last moment, there was one general feeling of anxiety about their souls. Bibles were brought out and read ; knees were bent in prayer ; one and another came to a faithful minister of Christ, begging him to pray with them. Meanwhile he went up and down amongst those who, as well as himself, were so soon to die, earnestly crying, 'O God, if they are unconverted, let them be converted now !' All was felt to be very real then. But, whether *felt* to be so or not, all *is* real and deeply important now ; and 'now is the accepted time, to-day the day of salvation.'

ACTS, ii. 41-47.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul : and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common ;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

WHAT a lovely picture do these verses set before us of the Church of Christ in its early days ! As we read the account it seems almost too good to be true. But there it is in God's own Book ; there to humble us as we feel how far short we come of those first Christians ; there to encourage us ; for the grace which made them what they were is

freely offered to us; there also to furnish us with a pattern for our imitation.

'The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.' We read in the prophets of *'a nation being born in a day;'* here we have a Church born in a day. And let us not think that these Christians thus added to the Church were like the stony-ground hearers, or like Jonah's gourd springing up quickly and soon perishing. No; they had all the marks of a true, and deep, and lasting work of grace within.

They were *heartly and earnest Christians*. They *'gladly received the word.'* They welcomed the Gospel to their hearts as a message of mercy and love. Their heart was in their belief and profession. They were not like many in these days, of whom we may say that they rather *submit* than *delight* to hear the Gospel. They received it with faith and gladness.

They were *confessing Christians*. Gladly receiving the word, they were baptized. So had Peter bidden. They did not reason within themselves, *'These are dangerous days; if we make an open profession of faith in Christ we shall be exposed to scorn and hatred, and perhaps death. We will then wait for a safer opportunity.'* They came forward at all hazards and joined the Church of Christ.

They were *united Christians*. Hence their names, *'the brethren,' 'the brotherhood.'* *'With one ac-*

cord' they worshipped. 'With one mind and one mouth' they glorified God. It was the admiring exclamation of heathen observers, 'See how these Christians love one another!' And thus were our Lord's own words fulfilled, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.'

They were *sincere, guileless, single-minded Christians*. 'They did eat their meat with singleness of heart.' There was nothing crooked or false about their characters and conduct. They received the word with the simplicity and teachableness of little children. They only desired to know what was God's message to them, and then, without doubting and cavilling, meekly received it and set themselves to obey it. Like Nathanael they were Israelites indeed in whom was no guile.

There were, too, in these early Christians *steadiness, diligence, and regularity in the use of the means of grace*. 'They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.' They felt they had yet much to learn, and they were careful to put themselves in the way of learning, by continuing in company with the apostles and waiting upon them for instruction. They '*continued*' also '*in breaking of bread and in prayers*.' The breaking of bread means of course the Lord's Supper. From the very first it was an understood thing that a Christian is one who ob-

serves Christ's command to take the bread and wine in remembrance of Him.

The '*prayers*' spoken of plainly mean public prayers ; prayers in the assemblies of God's people, and chiefly no doubt on the Lord's own day.

Further, there was amongst *these Christians a beautiful and blessed liberality*. Their circumstances, no doubt, were peculiar. They were surrounded by persecuting enemies. Any one of them through embracing the faith of Christ might lose his all. So as sheep will flock together in a storm, these sheep of Christ's pasture joined together and threw their property into a common stock for the good of all. Their example in *this* respect is not meant for our imitation ; but the spirit of love, and liberality, and unselfishness, which they showed, is one which we should pray for and cultivate.

The example of these Christians was attractive. It drew others to Christ and His people. Their consistency won the favour even of worldly lookers-on. Let us not turn away from the beautiful picture, and say, 'It is nothing to me ; I could never be like that.' The grace which in a few days made these Christians what they were can quicken, and warm, and sanctify our hearts ; and it is freely offered to us. They were very happy, and we may be the same. They let their light shine, and we with God's help may do the same.

'The Lord added to the church daily such as should

be saved. It ought to be *'such as were being saved.'* This is what the original words mean. Those who received the Gospel message, those who obeyed the call, 'save yourselves from this untoward generation,' were daily added to the Church. So the Church increased in numbers, as its members grew in grace. May the Lord give us to see such increase in these our days, and to show in ourselves such blessed growth in grace and love.

ACTS, iii. 1-11.

1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.

11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

THE first thing which seems to strike us in these verses is, the attendance of Peter and John upon the temple services. They '*went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer.*' This was three o'clock in the afternoon, the hour for the offering of the evening sacrifice. Amongst the Jews there were three stated hours of prayer; the first at the third hour, *i.e.* 9 A.M.; the second at the sixth hour, *i.e.* noon; the third at the ninth hour, 3 P.M. David says, 'At evening, and at morning, and at noon, will I pray and call aloud, and Thou shalt hear my voice.' Daniel 'kneeled down three times a-day, and gave thanks.' Peter and John had lately received miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, yet we see these holy men going up at the appointed hour to worship in the temple. They did not go there to preach, but to pray. If any men might have pleaded that they could do without services which were needful for others,—that they had other work to do in preaching the Gospel,—that (taught by the Holy Spirit) they could worship spiritually at home,—surely it was those two apostles. Let us learn, then, from their example to observe carefully appointed times of worship, and to frequent regularly the services of God's own house; 'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,' as much for prayer as for hearing the word preached.

It was as Peter and John were on their way into the temple that they saw a man lame from his mo-

ther's womb lying at the gate which is called Beautiful, placed there daily by his friends to ask alms of those that entered into the temple. This man looked up anxiously at the apostles as they were passing, and asked for help. They stopped, and bade him mark what they were going to do and say. The poor cripple's hope rose higher, but never rose to such a height as to lead him to expect what was coming. Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold have I none.' Christ Himself 'for our sakes became poor;' and His followers were poor men. They had not much at any time, but what they had they forsook to follow Christ. And yet these men, though poor, 'made many rich,' rich for eternity.

'*Such as I have,*' said Peter, '*give I thee.*' What was it that the apostle gave? He gave (as God's instrument, for of course he could give nothing of himself) perfect strength and soundness to a cripple who had never known what it was to walk. The richest and greatest man in Jerusalem could not have given the poor man such a blessing as that. The penniless apostle *could* give and *did* give to that helpless cripple a greater gift by far than a king, with his house full of silver and gold, could have bestowed.

We have not miracles of healing wrought amongst us in these days. We do not need them, for we have the complete record of God's will and God's love in the Bible. But there are those now

who, whilst like Peter and John they have little silver and gold, are able to give to the needy better things than these. See, for instance, some poor Christian woman giving to an afflicted friend, not money (for perhaps she has barely enough for her own support), but kind words, pleasant looks, little offices of love, half-hours of friendly sympathy. See a little child who has never had a sixpence that it could call its own, running errands for the sick and aged, and reading the Bible to those who cannot read it for themselves. See men and women who have worked hard all the week, denying themselves some ease on Sunday to teach boys and girls about the love of Jesus. See, what may be often seen, poor and suffering Christians denying themselves little comforts for the sake of others suffering more than themselves, and trying with patient love to lead the lost and sad to the Friend of Sinners. Of all these we may say that, whilst they have not silver and gold, they give what is more precious, more lasting. A full purse and a large heart and open hand do not often go together. We need not long for what God has not seen fit to give us. Small means need not cut us out of the privilege of giving to our fellow-sinners and fellow-sufferers blessings that gold cannot buy.

'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,' said Peter to the poor cripple, *'rise up and walk.'* When Jesus wrought a miracle He wrought it in His

own name, and by His own power; but when His apostles wrought miracles they did it only in their Master's name, and by His power, and they were always most careful to make this known. '*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk.*' Peter said to the palsied man at Lydda, who had kept his bed eight years, '*Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.*' When Paul cast out the spirit of divination from the damsel possessed with it at Philippi, he said, '*I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.*' But when our Lord wrought His mighty works, it was enough for Him to say to a leper, '*I will, be thou clean;*' to dead Lazarus, '*Come forth;*' to blind Bartimeus, '*Receive thy sight.*'

When Peter bade the cripple rise and walk, he at the same time '*took him by the right hand and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength.* And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, *walking, and leaping, and praising God.*' Can anything be more perfectly natural and simple than this account? The poor man had never once walked. How likely it was that when he felt the new power come into his limbs, he would not walk along quietly as men to whom walking was a common thing, but that he would try and exercise his new powers, and leap and walk by turns; praising God who had been so gracious to him.

It would not be difficult to find amongst ourselves some of whom the poor cripple is a true picture in one respect; they have never stirred one step towards heaven. And if we should, all of us, be eager to gain strength for a paralysed *limb*, let us not be satisfied with a paralysed *soul*; but pray that we may have spiritual life and strength through the name and by the power of Jesus of Nazareth.

ACTS, iii. 12-21.

12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you:

15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

18 But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of resti-

66 *St. Peter's Explanation and Address.*

tution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

WE cannot wonder that all the people who saw the cure wrought upon the poor cripple who sat begging at the temple-gate should be filled with amazement. He must have been very well known in Jerusalem. Hundreds must have passed him daily. His utter helplessness, his inability to walk or stand, were what all might satisfy themselves about. And now they see this same man walking, leaping, entering with other worshippers into the temple to praise and worship God. No wonder that the people ran together, scarcely believing their own eyes; no wonder that they looked on Peter and John as if they had come down amongst them fresh from heaven.

Now was the time for the apostles, if they had been so disposed, to make much of themselves; to take great credit to themselves for what had happened. But they had learnt from their blessed Master a very different lesson. Peter, therefore, hastened eagerly to disclaim all the credit of what had been just done, for himself and his brother-apostle, and to give all the honour and glory of the miracle Christ alone.

And then the apostle seized the opportunity of preaching one of his plain, stirring sermons. He told the people that this miracle had been wrought only in the name and by the power of

Jesus ; that same Jesus whom they would not have as their King, but entreated Pilate (notwithstanding that wretched man's conviction of his innocence) to crucify. As though they would cast the utmost possible scorn on the spotless Saviour, they chose Barabbas, the robber and murderer, before Him. 'You craved,' as St. Chrysostom puts it, 'as a favour from Pilate the life of one who killed others ; and you put to death Him who is the life of the dead.'

'*Ye killed the Prince of life.*' How strange the words sound ! and yet what a great and wonderful truth do they express ! And do they not remind us how entirely voluntary the death of Christ must have been ; how utterly impossible it would have been for the whole world to take the life of the Prince (or *Author*, as the word is) of life, unless he had been Himself willing to lay it down of Himself ?

'God,' said Peter, '*hath glorified his Son Jesus.*' Ye crucified Him, but God raised Him from the dead ; and we are witnesses of His resurrection. And now it is through faith in His name, *our* faith *by* whom this miracle was wrought, and *his* faith *upon* whom it was wrought, that this man, whom you have seen and known so long weak and helpless, stands here sound and strong amongst you. You indeed knew not what you were doing when you crucified Christ ; knew not that you were accomplishing what God by His prophets had long foretold.

‘Repent, and be converted.’ It is still the same exhortation again and again repeated. Acknowledge your sins; be ashamed and sorry for them; turn from them; turn to God. Does it seem as if the apostle was bidding them do what man could not do? None knew better than St. Peter that conversion is God’s work. But if a man says, ‘I cannot convert myself, and therefore I *need* do and *will* do nothing,’ he is acting a most foolish and fatal part. He does not ‘stir himself up to lay hold upon God.’ He does not ‘frame his doings to turn unto the Lord.’ He shuts the door of mercy against himself; he seals his own condemnation.

‘*Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*’ It is not that repentance *earns* forgiveness; that tears of sorrow for sin wipe out the record of our sins from God’s book. But God has joined together repentance and remission of sin. ‘If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’

And who can tell the full blessedness of having our ‘iniquities forgiven, our sin covered,’—of having ‘peace with God,’—of being set free from ‘condemnation?’

But although it is a blessed thing thus to know ourselves forgiven for Christ’s sake, all this is *as yet* more or less a secret between each man’s soul and

God. Confession of sin on the one side, and blotting it out on the other, is an unseen transaction which passes between heaven and earth, between our spirits and the 'Father of spirits.' But there is a '*time of refreshing*' coming; a day of *restitution of all things*, when the sons of God shall be 'manifested.' And then there shall be a public 'blotting out' of sin. Then the great Judge shall hold up, as it were, before the assembled universe the book of remembrance, and show the pages clear and white on which the names of His people were written; every charge of sin blotted out by His own precious blood.

This shall be the great day of the Lord's appearing. A day that shall 'burn as an oven' to some, but be a day of 'refreshing,' the 'rising of the Sun of righteousness with healing on his wings,' to others. (Mal. iv. 1, 2.) May God 'blot out as a cloud our transgressions' *now*, and *show* them to be blotted out *then*, through Christ our Redeemer.

ACTS, iii. 22-26.

22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

WE saw that in his sermon on the day of Pentecost St. Peter took his texts (for he had more than one) from the Old Testament, from David's Psalms, and the prophecy of Joel. In the same way in his sermon preached after the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful gate of the Temple, the apostle took a text from the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. We there read thus, 'The Lord thy

God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken. According to all that thou desirest of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God; neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.' (Deut. xviii. 15-18.)

This promise of the Messiah as a Prophet was well known to the Jews. When John the Baptist came they sent to ask him, 'Art thou that Prophet?' and he answered, 'No.' When Jesus fed the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes, the multitude amazed, said, 'This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.' In Stephen's address to the Jews before they stoned him, he refers to the promise of a prophet given to Moses as being very well known.

Now, said Peter, this promise is fulfilled. The Prophet spoken of has appeared. Moses was a type of Him, but a greater far than Moses is here. Jesus of Nazareth is the Prophet promised, the Mediator desired.

Prophets of old time were specially anointed for

their office as David, Elisha, and others. Christ was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His prophetic office. He said Himself, that there was fulfilled in His case the Scripture which said, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor.'

Jesus fulfilled when on earth the office of a Prophet, by predicting things to come; by expounding the Scriptures concerning Himself; by preaching the Gospel to the poor. And now He is the Prophet of His Church still, the same as ever. When He went up on high He 'gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.' And these are His gifts still. His is the fulness with which all are filled. He speaks through them. We must never think that because He works through means, therefore the working is not His. We must carefully listen to the great Prophet's voice when by His Spirit, His word, His ministers, He is pleased to speak to us.

We see that, together with the promise of a Prophet, there is a word of solemn warning: 'Every soul which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.' We know how fearfully the threat has been fulfilled in the case of the Jews. They for the most part refused to hearken to the Prophet sent. They even dared to mock His prophetic office, blindfolding Him, and smiting Him and crying, 'Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is

he that smote Thee?' And well we know how they were cut off; how wrath came upon them to the uttermost. Let us then take good heed lest we 'refuse Him that speaketh.'

God sent His dear Son 'to bless' us,—sent Him first indeed to Jews, but afterwards to us who were afar off. But Jesus blesses by '*turning us away from our iniquities.*' He saves us '*from our sins*' not '*in*' them. The great Prophet calls us to give up our sins, and bring our burdens of grief and care to Him. May we hear and obey His voice of love, and meekly follow Him!

ACTS, iv. 1-12.

1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them.

2 Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day : for it was now eventide.

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed : and the number of the men was about five thousand.

5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ?

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ;

10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

12 Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

PETER and John were earnestly engaged in preaching to the people, who had been startled and excited by the healing of the cripple at the gate of the temple, when the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees broke in upon them. The Sadducees were a sect that denied altogether the resurrection from the dead. To this sect the high priest, and many of those who were with him, at this time belonged. (See chap. v. 17.) It grieved and vexed them therefore, that men should be going about preaching that Jesus had risen again, and that at His bidding there should be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. So they laid hands on the apostles and put them in custody until the next day, for it was now evening.

But though the two apostles were hurried away to prison, a good work went on amongst the people. *‘Many of those which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.’* We read in the first chapter of one hundred and twenty; then we are told that on the day of Pentecost three thousand were added to the number of the disciples; and now five thousand are spoken of. *‘So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.’*

On the morrow there was a great gathering of all those who had one common wish to destroy the religion of Jesus of Nazareth. Rulers, elders, scribes, high priests, and their kindred, were all of

one mind in this. They sent for the apostles, and had them placed in the midst, and then began to question them about the miracle so lately wrought. As we see afterwards in the chapter, they could not deny that a notable miracle had been wrought; they could not possibly say (glad as they would have been to do so) that it was all imposture. The thing done was known throughout all Jerusalem. So then they asked the apostles, '*By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*' Our Lord had bidden His disciples when brought before kings and rulers for His sake, not to take anxious thought about what they should speak; for the Holy Ghost should teach them in the same hour what they should say. This promise was now remarkably fulfilled. A few weeks back Peter had been frightened by the question of a maid-servant into denying His Master. Now '*filled with the Holy Ghost,*' he speaks out before persecuting rulers with all boldness.

In his former discourses we saw how Peter took texts out of the Old Testament Scriptures, and showed how they were fulfilled. So now again he does the same. He takes a text twice, in slightly different words, repeated in the 118th Psalm and in the 28th chapter of Isaiah. The latter passage runs thus, 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation stone,—a tried stone,—a precious corner stone,—a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste.' St. Peter seemed to

dwell with delight upon this view of Christ as the foundation-stone of His Church. In his first epistle he enlarges on the prophecy of Isaiah just referred to; and shows how Christ is precious to them that believe, but a stone of stumbling to the faithless and disobedient. (1 Pet. ii. 4-8.) And it is well worth our while to notice how plainly the short sermon in the Acts and the Epistle are from one man; how the same thoughts appear in both.

‘You ask me,’ said Peter, ‘by what name this miracle of healing has been wrought. I will tell you. It is only by the name of Jesus of Nazareth,—that very Jesus whom ye crucified, but whom God raised from the dead; it is by His name alone that this poor helpless cripple stands amongst you sound and whole. ‘This is the stone set at nought by you builders which is become the head of the corner.’ Jesus Christ is the everlasting foundation of His Church; a ‘tried stone,’ hewn and smitten with the hammer of affliction; a ‘living stone;’ in this respect very different from stones in general, which though fitted to bear are cold and dead. He is a ‘precious corner stone.’ A corner stone connects together two walls of a building, and Jews and Gentiles are both one in Christ.

‘Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’ There could not be plainer, stronger language than this. It knocks

down utterly the loose notions of some men in these days, who profess to think that it does not matter whether we have clear knowledge of Christ and faith in Him; that all religions have something good in them; that if a man is sincere it matters little what he believes. The word is plain; '*There is salvation in none other.*' There is no other Saviour; no other sacrifice for sin; no other way of safety; no other hope of heaven. It is the name of Jesus only which is a name of sweetness; a name of sanctifying comforting power; a name that guides the living, cheers the dying, and will form the subject of the praises of the redeemed through all eternity.

ACTS, iv. 13-22.

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people; for all men glorified God for that which was done.

22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.

WE cannot wonder that the boldness of the apostles, Peter and John, as they stood on their defence before the Jewish Council, the power and authority with which they spoke, should amaze their hearers. Here were two plain fishermen, men of no scholarship, no high rank or station, and yet they stood up boldly before Annas, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, the rulers of the people and the elders of Israel, and charged them with an awful sin,—the sin of crucifying Jesus of Nazareth. They told those wicked men at the same time, that their sin after all was to no purpose, for that God had turned it all to His glory and the good of men ; and that the very Jesus whom they sought to destroy was exalted with great power to heaven, and was the only Saviour of the whole human race. This was strange language to come from such men at such a time. Annas and Caiaphas had taken a leading part in the condemnation and crucifixion of Christ ; and now here stand before these hard, ungodly men two of Christ's chosen followers. Yet they do not tremble, do not hesitate, do not plead for mercy ; but, in the most out-spoken way, turn round upon their judges, and reprove them for their sin, and preach to them the Gospel.

It was most natural that all this should set those persecuting judges looking at one another in surprise, wondering whence this courage, and power,

and wisdom came; what it all meant, and what it would end in.

But more than this. ‘ *They took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.* ’ They perhaps recognised the Apostles as having been seen with Christ in the rounds of His ministry; or they questioned them, and drew from them an acknowledgment that they had been Christ’s companions. The words, however, mean more than this. They saw, in the words and the conduct of the two apostles, a striking likeness to their great Master. That strange combination of apparent ignorance and wonderful wisdom—of meekness and boldness—of power and lowliness of position, reminded those who saw it very forcibly and very uncomfortably of the ways and doings of Jesus of Nazareth. It was, like Master, like servants. It was the old thing over again. These men (their enemies were forced to acknowledge) have not been with Jesus for nothing; they have caught His spirit; imbibed His feelings: they speak much as He spoke, act much as He acted.

We all become more or less like those whom we love and constantly mix with. And those who are much ‘ *with Jesus*; ’ holding communion with Him in prayer,—thus meeting Him, as it were, and reverently talking with Him; *with Him* in thought, even when their knees cannot be bent in supplication; *with Him* in the reading of His word; *with Him* in

His house, and at His holy table; *with* Him as a real, a present, a loving friend, an all-sufficient Saviour; such will grow more and more into a likeness to Christ, will breathe more of His spirit, walk more as He walked through an evil world.

It was not, however, only the boldness of Peter and John, and the power and wisdom with which they spoke, that perplexed those unjust judges. There stood, side by side with the apostles, the man who had been healed so wonderfully. This was a witness that they could '*say nothing against.*' They would like if they could to have *put* the man and *kept* him out of sight; just as after the resurrection of Lazarus the chief priests consulted to put him to death. Or they would have been glad if they could have made out that it was a piece of imposition, and that no miracle had been wrought. But the man was too well known. And he never had walked. So they were forced to allow that '*a notable miracle had been done*' by the apostles.

We might have supposed, then, that these men would have taken that miracle as a seal of the truthfulness of what the apostles taught. We might have expected that it would make them listen attentively to men so owned of Heaven. Sin, however, is very hardening. When men do *not wish* to believe, when they *hate* the light, and 'will not come to the light because their deeds are evil,' then signs and wonders will do little to move and melt them. The

wicked men of Sodom, when smitten by the angels with blindness, did not repent and cry for mercy; but, still bent on wrong and wickedness, 'wearied themselves to find the door.' 'The dumb ass speaking with man's mouth' startled Balaam, as it well might; but he still went on in his course of sin. Those 'who hear not Moses and the prophets,' who are not moved by the preached Gospel and the written Word, would not 'be persuaded' even by the 'notable miracle' of one rising from the dead to warn them. So these bad men *'called'* the apostles, *'and commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus.'* A short time back Peter would hardly have required such commands and threats to keep him silent. But now all was changed. He and his beloved companion declared at once, that *God's* command to speak entirely out-weighed *their* command to keep silence. Their hearts were full too, they *must* speak.

It often happens that God says one thing, and the world another. To which shall we hearken? which shall we obey? Oh, well indeed did our blessed Saviour give to His disciples, and to us, the warning, 'Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but rather fear Him who after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.'

ACTS, iv. 23-37.

23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is :

25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ?

26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings : and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

WHAT was the nature of the report, which Peter and John had to make to the assembled company of the disciples? They had to speak thus, 'We have been called before the Jewish Council, and closely questioned about what we have done, and what we are teaching. We have been strictly forbidden to speak any more in the name of Jesus. We have nothing to look for but stripes, and imprisonment, and perhaps death, if we persevere in preaching the gospel of Christ.' And how was such a report received? Not with fear and doubt. They did not all come to the conclusion that they would cease preaching, and wait for safer, quieter, happier times. On the contrary, they lifted up their voices together

in praise and prayer ; rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame and reproach for Christ's sake, and praying for grace to enable them to speak the word with all boldness, and for signs and wonders to confirm their testimony.

'They lifted up their voice to God with one accord.' Some have thought that the words uttered by this company of Christians were those of a hymn or prayer in common use amongst them. It is much more likely, that they were at the moment suggested to them by the Holy Spirit. Be this as it may, the voices of all these Christians joined together in worship and praise. St. Paul prays on behalf of the Roman Christians that they might be 'like-minded one toward another, so that with one mind and *one mouth* they might glorify God, even the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ ;' not with one *mind* only, but with one *mouth* also. It would surely be a very happy and profitable thing if, in our public worship, we were all more careful in making the responses. It would help to check wandering thoughts, it would assist in stirring up the flame of devotion, and give life and warmth and attractiveness to our services, if the voices of all joined more heartily in hymns, confessions, and prayers.

And now in this prayer, we may notice, that just as Peter took Old Testament texts for his sermons, so these Christians go back to one of David's Psalms, and delight to see in all that hap-

pened a full accomplishment of the word of prophecy written there. '*God by the mouth of His servant David*' had spoken of these things. David was only God's mouth-piece—God's penman. Taught and guided by the Spirit of God, he had spoken of '*the kings of the earth standing up, and the rulers taking counsel together against the Lord, and against his Christ, or His anointed One.*' And these words had been accomplished in the combination of Jews and Gentiles, Herod and Pilate, priests and people, in the crucifixion of Christ. How remarkable it is that all these, naturally opposed to one another, should have a part in that death which provides for all alike a Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness!

In all that had been done, those Christians only saw '*that which God's hand and counsel determined before to be done.*' It was not of course that God in any way whatever *made* those Jewish rulers and others commit a dreadful sin. This is utterly impossible. 'God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.' God simply *foresaw* the sins of these men, and used them and over-ruled them to work out His great purposes of mercy. And is it not a blessed thing to think that God has power and skill to make everything—dark and bright, good and evil,—work out His great, and wise, and gracious designs; and to make the wrath of man to praise Him?

The prayer offered up by these assembled Christ-

ians received a speedy and remarkable answer. Once again, as on the day of Pentecost, outward signs showed the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. '*The place was shaken where they were assembled together.*' And whilst thus it was clearly seen (as before by the mighty rushing wind) that something wonderful was happening, the work of the Spirit was manifested in the words and actions, both of the apostles, and of the multitude of them that believed.

As to the apostles, '*They spake the word of God with boldness.*' '*With great power gave they witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*' This was exactly what they had prayed that they might be enabled to do. At once the request was granted.

As to the multitude of the disciples, they were knit together in holy love. They were full of Christian liberality. They bore one another's burdens; supplied one another's need; gave up their own private interests for the good and comfort of all. Foremost amongst those who showed large-hearted liberality was Barnabas, who was afterwards called to be an apostle, and of whom we have such a beautiful character given us in the eleventh chapter of the Acts.

Now in all this grace bestowed on the apostles and their hearers, and in the signs which accompanied the gift of the Spirit, we have a lovely instance of prayer offered, and speedily, manifestly,

answered. Commonly prayer is a secret between God and our own souls. Here the answer came at once, and none could doubt about its coming.

If with us prayer is not answered in the same way, let us not doubt that it is answered as surely. Let us pray earnestly and hopefully, that God the Holy Spirit would work mightily upon our hearts, and that (as in the case of these early Christians) fruits of unselfishness, love, and liberality, in our lives, may make His working manifest.

ACTS, v. 1-11.

1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

9 Then Peter said under her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost : and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

THUS far, in following St. Luke's history, we have seen in the early Church what was 'lovely and of good report.' Now we are to see something different. There never was, and never will be, *on earth* an absolutely perfect Church. Even into Eden, with all its peace and purity, the serpent crept. There was a Judas amongst the apostles. Amongst God's wheat are always to be found tares. We have been looking at a beautiful picture of a flourishing Church ; and now we see a wolf climbing over into the sheep-fold ; deceit and falsehood springing up amongst the followers of a God of truth.

What was the exact sin of Ananias and Sapphira ? They saw Barnabas, and many others who were possessors of lands and houses, selling their possessions and bringing the whole proceeds of the sale and laying them down at the apostles' feet as an offering to the common fund. They, too, wished to get credit for unselfish generosity ; they wished to stand as high amongst their fellow-Christians as Barnabas and others who acted like him. So they sold their property, and let it be thought that they were bringing *all* that they obtained for it to the apostles. As Peter explained, they were not *com-*

pedled to sell the land at all. Or having sold it, they might have kept to themselves *all* that they sold it for. Here was the sin. They pretended to do what they did not do. Ananias came amongst the disciples with his bag of gold, giving them all to suppose that what he was bringing was all that he got for his land, whilst all the time he and his guilty partner were keeping back enough to make them sufficiently rich. If all had turned out as they hoped and expected, they supposed that it would have been said of them, 'Here is another noble instance of Christian liberality; here is another disciple giving up his all for Christ and His Church; another blessed proof of the working of the spirit of love.' And at the very same time the man who was thought and spoken so well of would have gone home and counted his remaining treasure, and pleased himself with the reflection that he had gained much credit and lost little money.

'*Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?*' Satan then prompted the lie, and taught Ananias to tell it and to act it. Our Lord speaks of the devil as being 'a liar and the father of it.' Lies of every kind, acted or spoken,—lies of the lips, and lies of the life, hypocrisies, and deceit of every kind,—all these are from beneath; all come up from the father of lies, and lead down again to the liar's final home.

Further, let us remark that when Peter said that

Ananias had 'lied to the Holy Ghost,' he added, 'Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.' And again, to Sapphira the apostle says, 'How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?' We have here the plainest possible proof of the essential Divinity of God the Holy Ghost. Tempting the Spirit of the Lord is lying unto God. It was not their fellow-Christians only that Ananias and Sapphira tried to deceive. Their lie was one that had to do with spiritual things. They dealt with a heart-searching God as if He were a man like themselves, and the Spirit whom they thus grieved is, with the Father and the Son, essentially and eternally God.

For such an awful sin there was an awful punishment. There was given to the miserable transgressor no space for repentance. The lie was fresh upon his tongue, when his guilty lips were sealed for ever. He '*fell down and gave up the ghost.*' He went down quick into the pit, to be with Satan and all his fellow-liars for ever.

'*About three hours after, his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.*' Perhaps she wondered that her husband was so long in coming. She had been anxiously waiting until he came back to tell her the favourable impression produced amongst the disciples by the money he had brought. Long she waited in vain, and then at last came in amongst the assembled company. Strange looks of fear and

doubt were turned on the wretched woman as she entered. *They* all knew what had happened; but *she* did not. To her look of wonder and inquiry, Peter answered, '*Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?*' i.e. the price brought and no more. Then the lie agreed upon between husband and wife came out: '*Yea, for so much.*' The money brought was all that we received. We kept back nothing. All that we got we gave.' Once more, as before, judgment overtook the transgressor. She, too, with the lie fresh upon her tongue, fell down a lifeless corpse at the apostle's feet. She and her husband had sinned together, and in their awful death they were not divided.

It is no wonder that great fear came upon all the Church, and upon as many as heard these things. It was enough to make men tremble, to see two who had so lately seemed promising members of the Church cut down in the very midst of their sin.

Let us not miss the solemn lesson taught us by this sad history, because we do not commonly see God's judgments breaking out in these days against sin and sinners. In those early days of the Church, signs, and wonders, and judgments were needful to rebuke opposition and confirm faith. They are not needed, or to be generally looked for, now. God at present 'keeps silence.' The day comes that will set all straight and make all plain; the day when 'men shall discern between the righteous and the

wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.'

Meanwhile, let us never think that liars go unpunished. Wickedness may seem to prosper. Lying may seem to succeed. But after all, one of the most terrible judgments that can fall upon a man is for him to be left alone in his sin; left to be entangled in it; left to grow hard and dead. He thinks God does not notice, and goes on to ruin with a lie in his right hand. We may deceive men; we cannot deceive God. Putting away all lying, and hypocrisy, and guile, let us 'speak the truth in love,' and act out the truth in our lives; praying that a God of truth would 'cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit,' and make us thoroughly sincere and upright in His sight.

ACTS, v. 12-16.

12 And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

13 And of the rest durst no man join himself to them : but the people magnified them.

14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one.

THE last thing which we read in St. Luke's history was the terrible outbreak of God's wrath against two notorious hypocrites and liars. It is no wonder that in consequence of it great fear came upon all the Church, and upon all that heard about it.

But judgment is God's strange work. Mercy is His delight. 'The Son of man came into the world not to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' He 'went about doing good, and healing all that were

oppressed of the devil.' And now in like manner His apostles, following His example, went about doing the same. Jesus had bidden them before He left them to act thus; and He had promised them needful power and authority. He had said to them, 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give.' And He had promised, 'These signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they shall drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.' The apostles obeyed the command, and the Lord, now as ever, fulfilled His promise.

Not only in Jerusalem itself, but from the cities and villages round about, came a multitude, having in their charge friends vexed with unclean spirits, poor distracted creatures; others bringing the palsied, and lame, the leprous, the deaf and dumb. And up and down the streets, in and out amongst the sick and suffering, moved that little company of apostles, — plain-looking, homely men; speaking a word of comfort to one and another, preaching the Gospel to all; whilst, strange to say, the palsied rose from his couch whole; the lame man leaped as a hart; the tongue of the dumb sang; the flesh of the leper came again to him as the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. So complete was the work

of mercy that even whilst Peter turned to touch one, and speak a healing word to another, his *shadow* falling upon a third wrought a cure. '*They were healed every one.*' Those were great days, glad days, days of blessing and of joy.

Those miracles were, as we saw in the case of the cripple healed at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, seals to the truth of the commission given to the apostles to preach the Gospel. 'No man could have done the things which they did, except God were with him;' and God would not have been with the apostles if what they preached had been anything else but the truth. We must all feel that if we had seen those wonders wrought we should have listened attentively to the man who wrought them as to a messenger from God. But let us remember that as these miracles are recorded in God's Book of Truth, written down there under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, they ought to be to us all the same as if we had seen them wrought. And when we read what Peter, and John, and James preached and *wrote*, we may well call to mind what by the power of God they *did*. We have, indeed, a double testimony to the truth of their teaching: the testimony given by Christ in enabling them to work the miracles, and the testimony given by the Holy Ghost in causing them to be recorded.

It is said of the company of Christians, now

rapidly increasing, that '*they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.*' An upper-room was not now large enough for their gatherings; they assembled, therefore, in that portico of the temple called Solomon's porch. Meanwhile, amongst those who were not yet professed disciples, there was a fear of joining themselves to them. The awful judgment which had fallen upon two hypocrites made a profession of faith in Christ seem a serious and solemn thing. '*The people magnified*' the apostles. Seeing what they did, and hearing what they said, they could not but hold these men in high honour. But a wholesome dread of seeming one thing and being another kept many back from making a profession at all.

The good work, however, went on triumphantly. '*Believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.*' '*Believers*;' the word has come into common use in religious books and amongst religious people. Some would call it a *party* word; a word belonging to a narrow-minded set of people. But why so? It is a Scriptural word; a plain, simple word, expressing a great truth. Christians are believers; those who are not Christians are unbelievers. No man likes to be called an unbeliever. It is an ugly word. And yet must we not fear that many who profess to be believers in Christ have nothing of faith but the name? Can a man truly believe in Christ and have

no love for Him; no desire to honour and obey Him? Can a man really believe what God tells him of the evil and danger of sin, and yet never earnestly seek pardon of it and deliverance from it? There can be no true believing if it does not lead to acting. Yet to be an unbeliever is a very dangerous thing. St. John says, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.' (1 John, v. 10.) To make God a liar! to give God the lie! What terrible sin and presumption must this be!

'Believers were added to the Lord.' Not added to Peter, or James, or John; not added to a party, however good; but *'added to the Lord;'* gathered into the number of the Lord's people; brought into union and communion with the Lord Christ. It would have pleased the apostles little to have been followed by men and women who attached themselves to them, as belonging to one party or another; to have one and another saying, 'I am of Cephas, and I of John, and I of James.' What they wished and aimed at was to bring all to Christ. *'Added to the Lord.'* There cannot be a truer and more honourable description of a sincere Christian. He is the Lord's purchase, the Lord's property; weak indeed, yet strengthened by the power of Christ resting upon him; sinful, yet cleansed by

the precious blood of Christ ; dying, yet the heir of a glorious immortality, because he is to be for ever *near* and for ever *with* the Lord who bought and owns him.

ACTS, v. 17-23.

17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and were filled with indignation.

18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

21 And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

WE are not accustomed to hear or read of men being '*filled with indignation*' when great public benefit is done, and charity shown. It does not generally arouse anger, and hatred, and opposition, for a man to support an hospital, or build an almshouse. Yet we read that the high priest and all

that were with him were '*filled with indignation*' against the apostles, who had just been healing a great multitude of sick folks, and '*laid their hands upon them, and put them into the common prison.*' This was strange treatment, to imprison men who had been doing acts of kindness and charity, and so bringing comfort to many a heart and many a home.

But here lies the secret of this strange proceeding. These apostles were the faithful servants of that very Christ whom that high priest and his party had reviled and condemned. And it made those wicked men doubly angry and bitter, that signs and miracles of healing proved the preachers of the Gospel to be men come from God, and made the people magnify them. So in utter defiance of all law and justice they seized the apostles, and thrust them into prison.

God, however, had much more work for these faithful men to do. And He has a thousand ways of defeating the designs of His enemies, and carrying on His work. Accordingly we are told that '*the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*' This deliverance was wrought in such a quiet manner that no one knew of it until the next day. The '*doors were safely shut, and the keepers before them,*' when the officers came to bring the prisoners

before their unjust judges. This is one of the instances in which the ministry of angels is said to have been used on behalf of God's faithful servants. An angel spake to Philip the Evangelist, and sent him to teach and baptize the Ethiopian eunuch. An angel was sent to good Cornelius, to direct him to Peter for instruction. A second time an angel was employed to bring Peter out of prison. When Paul was sailing as a prisoner to Rome, an angel was sent to him to cheer him and assure him of safety. We do not see angels now. But not the less do they 'encamp around them that fear the Lord and deliver them.' They are still as ever as St. Paul says, 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation.' They watch and rejoice over repenting sinners. They perform (no doubt of it) many an act of kindness, unseen and unsuspected, in sick chambers, by graves in which dear friends are laid, on journeys by sea and land, for God's people. They escort the souls of the righteous home.

There is, however, one thing that angels are not employed to do, *i.e.*, to preach the Gospel of Christ. They have not this privilege. It was not said to the angel who opened the prison-doors and brought the apostles out, 'Go *thou* and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.' He brought that message from God to the apostles; but he was not told to go and preach himself. Angels indeed

are never employed as preachers of the Gospel. It is men to whom that honour is given.

There seem to be two great reasons for this. One is given by St. Paul, when he says, 'We have this treasure (*i.e.*, the Gospel to be preached) in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us.' If bright angels occupied our pulpits, men would be likely to think more of the messenger than the message; and if any great effect were produced it would be attributed more to the power and wisdom of the preacher than of the God who sent him. Now 'men of like passions with ourselves,' weak, erring, ignorant, preach the Gospel, that it may be seen and known by all that the power is of God alone; that all may be forced to acknowledge that it is, 'not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit' of the Lord alone, that souls are saved and saints are edified.

And then there is another reason why men, and not angels, are employed in preaching the Gospel. It was not for angels that Christ died. Angels cannot speak as men can of being redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb slain. They cannot tell of sin's burden as those can who have groaned under it. They cannot speak of redeeming love, as those can who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious.'

'Go and speak . . . all the words of this life.'

Go and tell them how life,—eternal life is to be obtained ; go and proclaim to them Christ the way, the truth, and the life. ‘This,’ says St. John, ‘is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is His Son.’ So the Gospel of the grace of God may be fitly described as bringing words of life ; it makes to men an offer of life ; rightly received it puts them into possession of everlasting life. St. John tells us that the things which he was taught to write were written ‘that we might believe on the name of the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through His name.’ Jesus complained of the Jews of old, ‘Ye will not come to me that ye might have life.’ He said of His sheep, ‘I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’

And do we not all want life,—spiritual life ?—the life which the Gospel preaches and offers ?—the life which buds here and blossoms hereafter ? And what we want the Gospel brings. ‘The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.’ Sin *earns* death ; God freely *gives* life. And to Christ’s ministers now as to those apostles of old it is said, ‘Go and speak to the people all the words of this life ;’ go and tell them that it is the Spirit that giveth life ; and that Christ by His blood has purchased that Spirit for men, and in His love bestows that Spirit upon them ; go and tell them of a Foun-

tain of life ever flowing, overflowing, opened on the cross of Calvary for a dying world. Oh, may we all accept with faith and thankfulness the Gospel offer, and being made alive from the dead, have our 'fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life!'

ACTS, v. 24-32.

24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

30 The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

32 And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

THE angel of the Lord who brought the apostles

out of prison bade them go and preach the Gospel in the temple. At once they obeyed the command. In the night they were brought out, and '*early in the morning*' they were busy teaching and preaching in the temple. They could only expect hatred, persecution, imprisonment, and perhaps death, whilst they persisted in a course which had already provoked the enmity of the rulers of Jerusalem. Still let the consequences be what they might, they seemed unwilling to lose an hour. In prison half the night, the early morning found them preaching Christ in the temple.

Meanwhile, not knowing what had happened, the high priest and his party called together the council, and sent to the prison to have the apostles brought before them. They could not shut their eyes and ears to the miracles of healing which had been wrought by the apostles. Yet although they were thus shown to be under God's favour and protection, they had cast them unjustly into prison. Then behold a new wonder wrought. In the darkness and silence of the night the angel of the Lord opens the prison doors, and brings them forth. All was done very quietly. The sentries walked their rounds; the guards kept their stations; and none guessed that the prison was empty. Locks, and bolts, and bars, were all fastened as usual; all seemed right and safe until the time came when the supposed prisoners were wanted by the council. Then came

out the wonderful fact, that, in spite of locks and sentries, the imprisoned apostles were free, and actually at their old work of preaching the Gospel.

No wonder that when the members of the council '*heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto they would grow;*' doubted what would be the end of it all, and how they should meet these new difficulties. Having sent for the apostles, and had them brought without violence, not from kindly feeling, but simply from fear lest the people should stone those who ill-used their benefactors, the high priest angrily asked if they did not bear in mind the charge which had been given them not to '*teach in the name of Jesus?*' 'Behold,' he said, 'ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' There conscience spoke out. In their mad desire to kill Jesus, when Pilate anxious in any way to clear himself, had said, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person,' they had cried, 'His blood be on us and on our children.' And now, conscience-stricken, guilty, terrified, they felt as if their horrible imprecation were being fulfilled.

Peter once more, backed up by his brother apostles, preached one of his short but most effective sermons. It is still the old strain. 'You bid us to be silent; God bids us to speak; and speak we must. We tell you then that whereas ye slew and hanged on a tree Jesus of Nazareth, God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—raised Him up and exalted

Him with great power to His kingdom in heaven. We tell you that He is a Prince and a Saviour exalted to show mercy and to forgive; and we are His witnesses. The Holy Ghost also sent down according to His promise testifies of Him.'

We see in Peter's address to the Jewish council a striking resemblance to other sermons or addresses spoken by him. He did not seem to think it needful to be always straining after novelty. He did not reckon it a poor, dull thing to repeat often the same great truths. Why should he? Are not the great facts of Christ dying, Christ rising, Christ exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, the very foundation of all Christian doctrine?

Peter speaks of Jesus as exalted to '*give repentance*,' as well as remission of sin. There is a feeling in the breasts of some that there must be a certain amount of repentance, contrition, and amendment, to fit them to receive the blessings which Christ gives. And they are sorely troubled perhaps because they cannot work themselves up to needful sorrow for sin. Is there not here a mistaken view of the Gospel? True repentance springs from a deep, humbling, softening view of Christ's love. We are surely most sorry for having grieved a friend when we come to know how exceedingly kind that friend has been to us. The man who wakes up to the conviction, 'Christ has loved me, has given Himself for me, the just for the unjust to

bring me to God,' cannot help feeling ashamed and sorry for having slighted and dishonoured Him. Christ says by the prophet Zechariah of the people of Israel, 'They shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and mourn.' We must not wait until we have sufficiently repented before we come to Christ, but come to Christ that we may repent.

And if, as is too often the case, our hearts seem cold and unfeeling, and we can confess sin without realising its burden and shame, and hear the sweet story of the Saviour's love almost without a thrill of thankfulness, let us cry in our need and fear to Jesus and plead with Him the very purpose of His exaltation, and ask Him to give us a soft, and tender, and feeling heart; so that, coming back once again to the simplicity and sensitiveness of little children, we may know the blessedness of weeping tears of godly penitence at the foot of His cross.

ACTS, v. 33-42.

33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.

35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

38 And now I say into you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it: lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

40 And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

'When they heard that they were cut to the heart.' When they heard themselves boldly charged with the guilt of slaying One whom God had nevertheless exalted, and glorified, and given to man as his only Saviour, they were filled with rage.

'Cut to the heart.' We have a similar expression used in chap. vii., when these same priests and rulers, convicted and condemned by Stephen's faithful address, are said to have been 'cut to the heart.' In both cases, that of Stephen and that of the apostles about whom we are reading, it did not at all follow that, because these men were so 'cut to the heart,' therefore they turned back from their course of injustice and persecution, and repented of their wickedness and sought forgiveness for it. On the contrary, *'they took counsel to slay'* the apostles, and actually did slay Stephen. It was very different in the case of the three thousand who listened anxiously to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. Of them it is said that, 'They were pricked to the heart.' But this was not all. They eagerly asked, as men thoroughly in earnest, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' And when they were told, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost,' they at once obeyed. They went on from

conviction to conversion; from a pricking and piercing of the heart to a believing application to that precious blood which heals every wound, and washes away every stain.

Let us not forget that there is a 'sorrow of the world which worketh death,' as well as a 'godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.' We have instances of men 'cut to the heart' in Balaam, Saul king of Israel, Ahab, and Judas; and yet of none of these men could it ever be said that they truly repented. Sometimes a man will writhe under the burden, and pain, and pressure of sin; and say within himself, 'What a fool I have been! What a mad course I have pursued! What torment there is in these lusts and passions that drive me to destruction! What peace there must be, if I could but reach it, in being a true Christian!' And after all these feelings of remorse and shame pass away, perhaps leaving no change behind. And the poor, deceitful heart pleases itself with thinking that it is something better for what it has felt, even though it settled down again to its old course of vanity and sin.

We must not judge ourselves by our feelings, but see what those feelings lead to and end in. It is a poor thing to be 'cut to the heart,' if when reproved for sin we hate our reprovers more than our sin. If the word like a two-edged sword pierce our hearts, our question must be not, 'How must we *feel*?'—

but '*What must we do ?*' 'What must we do to be saved?' We must strike whilst the iron is hot; and bring our hearts with all their sins and stains to the Fountain of the Redeemer's blood; and cry for the grace of the Holy Spirit to make them clean and whole.

The wicked and cruel purposes of those Jewish rulers were checked by the prudent counsel of one of their number, Gamaliel,—a name known to us as that of St. Paul's instructor in the law. This man bade them to put the apostles forth a little while; and then cautioned the members of the council to be careful as to what they were doing. He reminded them of two pretenders, false Christs and false prophets,—who had gathered together followers, and yet who miserably perished, and all their followers were dispersed. 'If then,' Gamaliel argued, '*this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought,*' like that of Theudas, and Judas of Galilee; but if it should happen to '*be of God,*' it might be hazardous as well as useless to try to '*overthrow it.*' Opposition to the apostles might prove to be opposition to God.

The plain common sense and sound reasoning of Gamaliel could not but have some weight even with men so blind and prejudiced as these Jewish rulers. They called the apostles, and after they had (with the most shameful disregard of justice) beaten them, they let them go, commanding them once again to speak no more in the name of Jesus.

Now, bearing in mind Gamaliel's advice, we may ask, Has the work about which the apostles were so busy and so earnest come to nought? Has it been shown thus not to be 'of God?' There has been ample time since the day when Peter and his companions stood before the Jewish council to test their work. A few days, or weeks at most, were enough to scatter like chaff the designs of Theudas, and Judas of Galilee. Eighteen hundred years have tried the work of those fishermen of Galilee of what sort it was. What would Gamaliel, if he were now alive, have to say about it now? Would he not be compelled to pronounce of it, 'Truly it *is* of God; for nothing that is not of God would have stood the test of centuries as this has, and have grown and multiplied and filled the earth in such a manner, in spite of all that opposed it.' Yes, 'the little one has become a thousand.' The grain of mustard-seed has become a great tree. The religion of Jesus Christ is a great established fact in the world. And if so; if God's great work goes on, and *will* go on and prosper, is it not our high honour and privilege and safety to be fellow-workers with Him? Is it not best and wisest to be on the winning side? And let us remember those plain and solemn words of Christ: 'He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.' We cannot be neutral. We must be with Christ or His enemies.

Let us take heed lest haply we be found fighting against God.

And let us keep in mind, too, that the struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness, between God and Satan, goes on not only *around* us, but *within* us. When we read the Bible, when we kneel down to pray, when we go forth into the world, when we retire to our rest at night; constantly there is a struggle going on in our hearts between the tempter who would ruin us and the Holy Spirit who would save us. And we have the fearful power of choosing with which we will join. Surely our wisest, safest course is not to shut our eyes to the truth and say, 'I know nothing of such a struggle; I can very well hold on my course safely;' but rather to cry, 'O Lord, thou Strength of Israel, strengthen me; I am guilty and unclean, merciful Saviour, pardon, and cleanse, and heal me;—O God the Holy Ghost, sanctify me; uphold me in the strife and give me final victory.'

ACTS, vi. 1-8.

1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte of Antioch;

6 Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

THE Grecians, or Hellenists, spoken of in the first of these verses, were Jews who spoke the

Greek language, and whose ordinary abode was out of Palestine. They were commonly looked down upon by the Hebrews, who prided themselves upon speaking the Hebrew tongue, and living mostly, if not entirely, in the land of Israel. There was, as we have seen in the former chapters of the Acts, a common fund out of which there was a daily distribution made according to the wants of each. The Grecians thought that this fund was not fairly administered; that some partiality was shown; that Hebrew widows were cared for and Grecian neglected.

The twelve apostles therefore '*called the multitude of the disciples together*;' showed them how the work of providing for the support of the poor interfered with the more direct work of the ministry, and proposed that '*seven men of honest report, and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*,' should be appointed to see after this business.

The plan of the apostles pleased the Church, and, acting at once upon it, they chose seven fit men whom they set before the apostles, who with prayer ordained them to the office of deacon. Judging by the names of these deacons they seem to have been all Grecians, chosen therefore from the number of those who thought that they had some reason to complain of their widows being neglected.

The new arrangement, which unquestionably the great Head of the Church guided His servants to make, worked well.

'The word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly;' and from the most unlikely class of all, as we should reckon it, converts came; for *'a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.'*

And now St. Luke's history dwells for a little upon the life, work, and death, of one of these newly-ordained deacons, St. Stephen. There is something peculiarly interesting to us in his story. We say (or sing) time after time in that sublime hymn which we use between our morning lessons, 'The noble army of martyrs praise Thee, O Lord.' Of that noble army Stephen was the leader. That is, of course, after Christ the first great Martyr, the King of martyrs, 'the faithful and true witness,' or 'martyr,' as the word equally means. And Stephen, in his faith, patience, courage, and meekness, furnished a lovely pattern of what a Christian martyr should be. Since his day thousands have died for Christ's sake. Men, women, and even children, have been hurried by the axe, the sword, and by fire, into the presence of their Lord whom they confessed and honoured. And all such, in the endurance of cruel mockings and scourgings, of bonds, and imprisonment, and death, could look back upon Stephen's story and take courage, seeing how he was kept in peace and patience, how he was sustained, how he was cheered with a vision of heavenly glory, how the Lord for whom he suffered was seen waiting to

receive him, and how in the midst of tumult and torture with a prayer for his enemies upon his tongue, he sweetly fell asleep.

We know that Stephen was a man 'of *honest report*'—highly esteemed for his integrity and blamelessness of life,—for only such men were to be chosen, and were actually chosen, as deacons. And we are further told of him, that he was '*full of faith and of the Holy Ghost*'—'*full of faith and power.*'

'*Full of faith and power.*' It is no wonder that the words come together. For what is it that gives men real power?—power to endure—power to testify for Christ—power to persevere to the end, faithful *unto* death and *in* death—but faith: the faith which enables a man to endure as seeing Him that is invisible,—the faith by which he looks through, and above, and beyond all that is dark and terrifying, and sees God his Father smiling approval upon him—Christ his Saviour pleading for him—heaven opening to receive him? What made Moses, and Joseph, and Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and hosts more, strong and steadfast in hours of terrible trial, but the faith which showed them not angry rulers, savage beasts, or a fiery furnace; but God *near* them, *with* them, helping them, defending them, preparing for them a crown of glory? Yes, a man of faith is sure to be a man of power. And, on the other hand, a man who

walks only by sight, who has little or no faith—who thinks of God as far off, and not nigh—thinks of Christ as having died for every one but himself—speaks as if God could not hear—acts as if God did not notice,—such a man will be blown along by every breath of temptation, and instead of being steadfast in confessing Christ, will, to avoid ill-will and trouble, dishonour and deny Him.

Let us pray, ‘Lord, increase our faith.’ And since faith grows by exercise—by prayer—by reading—by hearing,—let us be careful to feed and strengthen it in the diligent use of the means of grace. Let us try more and more to set the Lord before us. Day by day let us renew our confidence in Christ our Saviour, stirring up afresh (with the help of the Holy Spirit) our drowsy faith into more active exercise. Let us try really to act more as those who believe what the Bible teaches, and what they themselves profess.

It is said further, however, of Stephen, that he was ‘*full of the Holy Ghost.*’ His heart was under the direct guidance and governance of God the Holy Spirit. That great and blessed Spirit possessed him as His very temple and dwelling-place—enlightening, strengthening, comforting him; giving him a mouth and wisdom which all his adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist.

‘*Full of the Holy Ghost.*’ They are very solemn words; they touch on a deep but blessed mystery.

For there is something surely very solemn in the thought of the Holy Spirit occupying a man's heart, as a Spirit of wisdom, holiness, and power. We cannot fully enter into these things. They are beyond us. Only this we know, that this dwelling of the Spirit in the heart of the Christian is a very real thing. We know that all good thoughts, all holy desires, all heavenly affections, come from the working of the Holy Spirit. We know, too, from the Bible (God, of His great mercy grant that none of us may know it by bitter experience!) what a sad and dangerous thing it is to grieve the Holy Spirit, to quench His blessed light and fire, to vex Him and turn Him into an enemy.

St. Paul bids us to 'be filled with the Spirit.' He would not have given such an exhortation if to be so filled was an impossible thing, which it was useless to aim at and hope for. Our Lord most graciously assured us, that our heavenly Father was more ready to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him, than earthly parents to give good gifts to their children. How beautiful then, how suitable, how necessary for us are those prayers of our Church, 'Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit;' 'Forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee, mercifully grant that Thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

ACTS, vi. 9-15.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law :

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

WE have read the lovely character given us of Stephen ; how he is said to have been a man ‘ full of faith and power ’—‘ full of the Holy Ghost.’ It pleased God to confirm his testimony to the truth by enabling him to do ‘ *great wonders and miracles among the*

people.' In this was fulfilled (as we have already seen in other instances) Christ's promise to His servants. And then immediately after another gracious promise made by the Saviour was as remarkably fulfilled. For He had bidden His disciples, when taken before kings and rulers, not to be anxious about what they should say; for said He, 'I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay and resist.'

There arose certain men of different synagogues disputing with Stephen; men supposed to be men of learning and wisdom, well read in the law of Moses: yet they were unable to '*resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.*' They were all worsted in argument by this newly-ordained deacon of the Church. It is quite a common thing for men who hate the truth, when defeated in argument by those who love and teach it, to try to crush by force both the truth and its teachers. We are not surprised, then, that Stephen's enemies should, when defeated by him in reasoning, hire false witnesses to accuse him. It was in this way that, more than nine hundred years before, wicked Jezebel had brought about the death of Naboth. It was in this way, only a few months before Stephen suffered, that the very men who accused him had dealt with his Divine Master. In the case of Stephen and of our Lord, they laid hold upon truths and prophecies uttered

by each, and twisted them and perverted them, and kept back what they pleased, and so gave an utterly false character to what was truth in the outset. The worst and most mischievous lie that can be told is a lie which has in it a mixture of truth. No doubt Stephen, following his Master's example, had spoken of sore judgments coming on Jerusalem if the Gospel were rejected; no doubt he had hinted at the passing away of the types and shadows of the Old Testament dispensation now that Christ had come; but there was not in all that he said one '*blasphemous word*,' one word spoken in slight of God's holy law. It was just in the same way that Jesus was accused; and He had warned His followers to expect such treatment. And, as it is beautifully expressed in our Prayer-book, 'There should be no greater comfort to Christian persons, than to be made like unto Christ; by suffering patiently adversities, troubles, and sicknesses. For He Himself went not up to joy, but first He suffered pain; He entered not into His glory before He was crucified.'

Whatever were the charges brought against Stephen, and although it soon became perfectly plain that his judges were bent upon his death, he stood before them calm and peaceful. Nay, more than this. '*All that sat in the council, looking steadfastly upon him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*' They saw a change pass over his countenance, but not the change of fear and anger. A

heavenly brightness, a gleam of glory, began to spread over it, such as holy men of old saw on the faces of angels sent to them with messages from heaven. They looked and looked again, scarcely believing their own eyes; and there it was, that face shining with heaven's own light, like '*the face of an angel.*' When Moses held close communion with God on Horeb, his face shone when he came down from the Mount. So with Stephen, a look with the eye of faith at his Lord, which, changed as he was dying into an actual sight of Him with his bodily eyes, may have thrown an unearthly brightness over his countenance. We cannot but see in what happened a miracle wrought on Stephen's behalf. It would be a poor meaning to give to the words to say that Stephen looked as calm as an angel could look. This is true; but there is more than this. His face shone in such a strange, unearthly way, that all those priests and rulers might have seen, if only they would have owned, that here was a man under the favour and protection of God. We might have expected that, startled by such a sight, the council would have been broken up, and Stephen would have been set free, if not loaded with honours. But it is the old lesson taught over again. Spirits from the unseen world, angels sent with special messages, signs, wonders, miracles, sick-beds on which men lie hanging, as it were, by a thread over the pit; all these go for little or nothing with

those who hear and read of Christ and His love in vain, and 'neglect the salvation' offered in the Gospel.

It cannot of course be expected amongst ourselves that some miraculous brightness should mark the faces of those who fear God and think of His name—who take pleasure in prayer, and are faithful in confessing Christ. But certainly it is a fact, that more or less the expression of the face will tell a tale often of the state of the heart within. Have we not all met with Christians whose look of peace and composure, whose eyes beaming with love and gentleness, whose perfectly guileless aspect, told of a heart at peace with God, of earthly passions restrained, and a hope full of immortality? Yes; the face is often (not *always*, but *often*) a true index of the state of the heart within.

Too often, alas! a countenance, sour and sad, sulky and downcast, tells a tale of unruly passions working within, of peace departed and hope all but lost. Perhaps some secret sin has been indulged in; good habits given up; the Bible left unread; prayer neglected; early lessons forgotten; and a spirit of discontent, murmuring, and fretfulness, allowed to trouble the daily life. And the face, instead of shining like Stephen's with heavenly brightness, has a sourness and gloom over it which say plainly, 'Something wrong is going on there.' It does not, indeed, matter much whether we have bright and

sunny faces or no; but it *does* matter *very much* whether we have easy consciences, and hearts at peace with God. And it is more common than we might at first think for the face to be a true tell-tale, and to whisper a sad story of guile, and sorrow, and anger, and shame within. Our very looking-glasses might often read us a lesson of warning, if we would but learn it.

May God give us more of holy Stephen's faith, and love, and devotedness! May our hearts and lives be so leavened by the grace of Christ, and by the peace which he gives, that our very countenances may speak for our Master, and show that there is something softening, soothing, elevating, in being with Jesus!

ACTS, vii. 1-29.

1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so ?

2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken ; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.

4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldæans, and dwelt in Charran : and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on : yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land ; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God : and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.

8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision : and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day ; and Isaac begat Jacob : and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.

9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt : but God was with him.

10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave

him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he and our fathers.

16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem.

17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

19 The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil-entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian;

25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not.

26 And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.

In order to understand rightly Stephen's arguments in his defence of himself before the Jewish council, we must keep in mind what was the accusation brought against him; '*We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.*' '*This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*'

This, then, was the charge brought against Stephen; that he had spoken slightly of Moses the chosen law-giver of Israel; that he had dishonoured the holy law given on Sinai, and therefore also the God who gave it; that he had taken pleasure in predicting the destruction of the temple and the holy city in which it stood; that he had spoken of Jesus of Nazareth as abolishing the religious rites and ceremonies established by Moses under God's direction, and so long observed by God's own chosen nation.

There was of course the most gross hypocrisy in such charges. There was a wretched pretence of zeal for God's honour and glory. It was as much as saying, '*We* care much more for God's law than *you* do. *We* honour and respect the temple and its holy services much more than *you* do. *We* think far more highly of Moses and his mission than *you* do.'

It was just in this way, with the same kind of charges, with just such a false show of zeal for God, that these very men had before attacked Stephen's Lord and Master. And Jesus exposed their hypocrisy much in the same way as Stephen did in his address to the Jewish council. On one occasion the Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him, because He had wrought a miracle of healing upon the Sabbath day, and also because He had 'said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.' Jesus then said to them, 'Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?' (John, v. 45-47.)

Stephen showed that the presence and grace of God were not confined to one favoured spot, as Judæa; for '*the God of glory appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia;*' that the promises

were made to Abraham before the Levitical law, before circumcision ; that it would not be safe for them to conclude that they were right in rejecting Christ because they belonged to God's chosen people, for that in just the same way the patriarchs moved with envy had rejected their brother Joseph, who yet had God with him, and proved to be the preserver of the lives of his family. He showed further that Jacob and the patriarchs died not in Canaan but in Egypt, possessing in the land of promise only a burying-place.

And then when that Moses was born of whom they delighted to boast, his brethren understood not his mission. Though a beauty almost more than human marked him out at his birth as no common child ; though he was so marvellously saved from death in infancy ; though by his training in Pharaoh's court he became learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and so peculiarly qualified for his work as the leader and deliverer of Israel, still his people *'refused him, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge ?'* Thus very early in the history of the nation did the people to whom God sent a deliverer reject him, thus furnishing a type and figure of the future rejection of Christ, that great Deliverer of whom Moses spoke.

Now before we go further in the consideration of Stephen's address, let us gather up one or two practical lessons from that part which we have read.

We see then plainly that in God's word and in God's dealings there runs throughout, at all times, a beautiful consistency. From first to last all blessings have come to man of God's free grace and promise. His grace is not tied to one spot, or to one nation, or to one age.

We see, again, that the God of the New Testament is the God of the Old. Those who slight the one will be sure to slight also the other. Those who reject Moses will, in heart if not in profession, reject Christ.

And surely when we see the spirit of enmity, hatred, cruelty, and injustice, shown by those Jewish rulers, notwithstanding their descent from Abraham, their boast in Moses, and all their national privileges, we ought to be reminded that no privileges, no advantages, no profession, can in themselves make us safe, and happy, or can in any way make up for the absence of that faith in Christ, and holiness of life, without which we cannot see God.

ACTS, vii. 31-53.

30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

35 This Moses, whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

36 He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel; A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

38 This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with

the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers : who received the lively oracles to give unto us :

39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us : for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven ; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness ?

43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them : and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David ;

46 Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

47 But Solomon built him an house.

48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; as saith the prophet,

49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool : what house will ye build me ? saith the Lord : or what is the place of my rest ?

50 Hath not my hand made all these things ?

51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye.

52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted ?

and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One ; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers :

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

CONTINUING his address, Stephen speaks of God's appearance to Moses in a flame of fire in a bush in the wilderness of Horeb. 'There,' he says, 'did Moses receive his commission to go and deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt.' And after '*showing signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,*' he did so bring them out. And this very Moses of whom you boast pointed to that Jesus whom you reject, as a Prophet that should be raised up like unto himself, to whom it would be very perilous not to hearken. You glory in your position as God's chosen people, but remember how even in the very days when the law was given, your forefathers made a calf and sacrificed to the idol, saying, 'We wot not what is become of this Moses which brought us out of Egypt.' Remember, further, all the horrible idolatries which led to the captivity in Babylon. And if you glory in the temple, remember that God showed His glory, heard prayer, received praises, when as yet there was no temple built. The '*tabernacle of witness in the wilderness*' was a holy place, though it was only temporary, and moved from spot to spot. It accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings, and was brought in with Joshua into Canaan,

the land of promise.* It is true Solomon afterwards built a temple for God's honour. But '*the most High*,' the Lord of heaven and earth, '*dwelleth not in temples made with hands*.' It is vain to boast of a glorious place of worship, whilst the humble spirit of a true worshipper is wanting.

Up to this time the members of the council had listened to Stephen's address with tolerable patience. But now he could see plainly enough that they would bear no more. Sullen looks, impatient gestures, angry whispers between one another, showed him that the truths which he had been uttering had touched the consciences of his listeners. So he hastened, before he was interrupted, to bring his discourse to a close with a few words of pointed application.

We have seen, in several of the chapters of the Acts which we have already read, how St. Peter, addressing the Jewish rulers and people, brought home to them in plain, strong words their guilt in crucifying the Lord Jesus. Following the same example, St. Stephen now says, '*Ye have been now the betrayers and murderers of the Just One*,' whose coming your own prophets have foreshown. Nor only this, but the very law against which you charge me with speaking blasphemous words; that law

* The word translated 'Jesus' and 'Joshua' is in the original the same. It is a pity, however, that it is translated as it is in this chapter, as it might perplex some.

which was given in thunders from Sinai, when God came down with thousands of holy angels for its delivery, that very law ye have not kept. Unworthy children of faithful Abraham—rejecters of Moses—despisers of Christ—transgressors of the law,—*ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in hearts and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye.*

Now one thing must be quite plain to us in these words of St. Stephen ; that is, that the Holy Ghost must have had some dealings with these men, else he could not properly have spoken of them as ‘*resisting*’ Him. We cannot resist one with whom we do not in any way come in contact or connexion. Suppose some poor creature, weary of a life of sin and shame, were to lift a cup of poison to his lips, and a kind friend were to try and dash that cup aside, but to try in vain ; the self-murderer, persisting in his sin, would have resisted his benefactor and so have perished. But if there had been no interference, there could be no resistance.

So, then, even with these Jews the Holy Ghost had striven for their good. He had pleaded with them through the voices of their prophets read in their synagogues every Sabbath day. And but lately, ‘God, who in times past had spoken unto the fathers by the prophets, had spoken unto them by His Son,’ who was anointed by the Holy Spirit for His work of preaching the Gospel to the poor. Thus,

and in other ways, the Holy Ghost had made, as it were, an attack on these men's hearts. He had striven with them, and they had resisted him.

And if this were the case with regard to them, must it not be even more so with regard to those who have been brought into the fellowship of Christ's Church—who sit under the sound of the Gospel—who have God's word in their hands, and in outward profession at least call themselves Christians? Yes, there is not one of us whom the Holy Spirit has not visited; with whom He has not striven for his good.

Can we not all think of early lessons about God learnt in childhood; of prayers breathed by a mother's knee; of solemn feelings awakened by sermons and religious books; of fears about dying in times of sickness; of faithful Christians whom we have met, whose peace, and joy, and usefulness, made us wish to be like them? Can we not call to mind many a pang of remorse and shame following the commission of sin? At such times, by many different instrumentalities, the Holy Spirit was striving with us. And what is the consequence of resisting Him? Isaiah tells us of Israel of old, 'They rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.' (Isa. lxiii. 10.) How does the Holy Spirit become the enemy of the man who vexes and resists Him? Only by taking away His light and guidance, and

leaving the man to become *his own enemy*; 'leaving him alone,'—alone with his sin—alone in his self-delusion.

Oh, let us all take good heed that we do not '*resist the Holy Ghost.*' Rather let us listen carefully to His gentle whispers, let us yield ourselves to His holy guidance! He works through means, then let us diligently use them; praying meanwhile that the Comforter would 'take of the things of Christ, and show them unto us,' and that we may ever be kept from the sin and danger of 'grieving' that blessed 'Spirit through whom we are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

ACTS, vii. 54-60.

54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

'When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart.' We had the same expression in the fifth chapter. It is said of the Jewish council, before which Peter and the other apostles were called and accused, that when Peter charged them with their sin in crucifying Jesus, *'they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.'* And so now, *'they*

were cut to the heart' by Stephen's words, and 'gnashed upon him with their teeth.' They felt that he spoke the truth. Their own consciences confirmed each sentence that he uttered ; and instead of being angry with themselves, they were angry with the man who exposed and denounced their sins.

Stephen knew well what was coming. That 'gnashing upon him with their teeth,'—the fierce looks bent upon him,—the impatient gestures of those who surrounded him,—all told him that his hour was come. And now, '*Being full*'—of what? Of fear;—of anxiety,—of indignation at the unjust treatment he was meeting with? No! but '*full of the Holy Ghost.*' In his lifetime, when first chosen to the office of a deacon, it is said of Stephen that he was 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.' It was not then for the first time, when his death drew near, that Stephen knew something of the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Long before this he had been 'led by the Spirit,'—had been 'filled with the Spirit,'—had 'walked in the Spirit.' So now, in his hour of bitter trial, the Spirit was *with* him,—*in* him, filling his soul with peace, and hope, and heavenly comfort. And so it ever will be. According as we walk by the Spirit's guidance in the busy scenes of our daily life, so when heart and flesh fail may we expect to have that Spirit with us, breathing into our souls a peace which passeth understanding, a hope full of immortality.

'He looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.' Stephen was still standing before the council, but for a few bright moments he lost sight of them utterly. He looked with earnest, stedfast gaze towards heaven, and the roof of the council-chamber, the clouds, the sky, all vanished, and through the opening heavens he saw *'the glory of God'* (the Shechinah, such as filled the temple of old, and especially *'the holy of holies,'* with a cloud of glory), *'and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.'* Just as the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened to see hosts of angels surrounding his master to defend him from the Syrians, so to Stephen, just about to die for Christ, new powers of sight were given. He had a glance within the veil. *'I see,'* he said, *'the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.'* There it was,—that rent in the heavens,—the flood of light bursting through,—the glory of God encircling the throne,—and Christ the great Mediator waiting to receive the martyr's spirit. He saw that great and blessed sight, but others saw it not. And may we not well believe that often such sights, seen by them alone, cheer God's people in their parting hours? Why should we call it the wanderings of delirium when they tell us that they see angels around their dying bed? It need not be so. Let us follow Stephen in our lives, and we may be sure of it, whether we catch

glimpses of heaven in dying or no, we shall have special help and comfort given for the hour of special need.

'He saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God.'
'I see the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.'
'Standing,' not 'sitting.' Yet St. Paul more than once speaks of Christ as '*sitting* on the right hand of God;,' 'sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.' There seems a peculiar meaning, then, in the expression 'standing.' Jesus is spoken of as 'standing on the right hand of God;,' 'standing,' as though He had risen from His throne to defend His faithful servant, 'standing' ready to receive him when the struggle was over.

'I see the Son of man.' Jesus, when standing before the Jewish council, had spoken of Himself as the 'Son of man,' and told them of a day when they would see Him coming in power, and great glory, and with the clouds of heaven. Stephen, too, spoke of the Son of man standing in glory at the right hand of God. As with the Master so with the servant, all their rage and hatred were aroused by such words. A perfect yell of execration burst forth. They stopped their ears, as if they would hear no more of such blasphemy, and rushed upon Stephen, and dragged him out of the city to stone him.

The Jews when anxious for Christ's death had said to Pilate, 'It is not lawful for us to put any

man to death.' But, although the power of formally condemning any one to death was taken from them by the Romans, when at any time, in religious matters, they took the law into their own hands, the Roman government thought it wisest not to interfere. Like Gallio they cared nothing for words, and names, and matters of the Jewish law. Under the old Levitical law stoning was the appointed punishment for blasphemy. These wicked hypocrites pretended to think Stephen guilty of this sin; and so, as if they could not restrain their righteous wrath, without form or trial they took the law into their own hands, and in a summary way executed judgment.

'They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' The word 'God' is not in the original. The verse should, therefore, rather be 'Calling and saying,' or 'Calling upon Christ, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Our blessed Lord Himself had cried when dying upon the cross, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit.' But Stephen addresses the Saviour; and into whose hands could he more fitly commend his spirit than to those of the Lord Jesus, the great Mediator, the merciful and faithful High Priest, the Son of man whom he had just seen waiting to receive him? Stoning was a most cruel, lingering, uncertain kind of death. Yet nothing aroused the martyr's anger,—nothing ruffled his peace. He had prayed for him-

self, now he had a prayer to put up for his murderers. And to offer this his very last prayer on earth he would kneel. By this time many a sore bruise and fracture must have made it most difficult for him to kneel; yet he knelt. Does not dying Stephen's conduct in this respect shame those Christians who in full health and strength are too lazy and self-indulgent to kneel in prayer? Stephen knelt, and, like his blessed Master, prayed for those who slew him: 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;'—a prayer which soon received, in the conversion of Saul, as well as in other ways, a rich and gracious answer.

'And when he had said this, he fell asleep.' We should have little expected such an expression to be used of such a death. We might rather have looked for something like this, 'When he had said this he could say no more; his strength was spent; covered with bruises, battered, mangled, bleeding, death put an end to his sufferings.' But it is not thus that the martyr's end is spoken of. *'He fell asleep.'* Commonly when we hear or use such words we think of a soft bed, a quiet chamber, and peaceful repose. It seems strange to speak of falling asleep in the midst of shouts, and yells, and curses, and the blows of heavy stones quenching life. But there is no mistake about it. Death in all that can be properly called death was abolished for Stephen. *'He fell asleep.'* Sleep implies continued existence, rest, and an awaking again. And when Stephen committed

ACTS, viii. 1-4.

Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles.

And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made mourning over him.

But Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into synagogues, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

It would seem as if the malice of the Jewish council was satisfied, for a time at least, with Stephen's death. At any rate they did not interfere with his body being carried away by his friends for burial. It is possible that those bad, cruel men may have been a little staggered by the strange circumstances of the martyr's death. That wonderful vision of the dying man,—his words about seeing the Son of man standing at the right hand of heaven and the Son of man standing at his last prayer for his murderers, and the composure with which he resigned his soul into the Saviour's hands,—all this could hardly have

his spirit to Jesus, it is most plain that he knew and felt that it would live separate from the body, live safe with Jesus. It makes death none the less a blessed sleep for the Christian, that cruel hands inflict it and pain accompanies it. Let him die *as* he will and *where* he will, the righteous falls asleep, to wake up satisfied with the Saviour's glorious likeness.

ACTS, viii. 1-4.

1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

It would seem as if the malice of the Jewish council was satisfied, for a time at least, with Stephen's death. At any rate they did not interfere with his body being carried away by his friends for burial. It is possible that those bad, cruel men may have been a little staggered by the strange circumstances of the martyr's death. That wonderful patience of the dying man,—his words about seeing the glory of heaven and the Son of man standing there,—his last prayer for his murderers, and the calm composure with which he resigned his soul into his Saviour's hands,—all this could hardly have

been without some effect even on the minds of such men as those. They had done enough. Their cruel business over; they walked away, pleasing themselves no doubt with the thought that they had silenced a preacher of the gospel of Christ.

Then when the way was clear, some pious friends of the faithful martyr came and saw the battered corpse and took it away for solemn burial. In what is told us here and elsewhere in the Bible there is everything to encourage proper respect for the earthly remains of them that sleep in Jesus. It is right in the sight of God; it is natural, reasonable, scriptural, to carry our friends to the burial, as devout men carried Stephen, with all due regard and honour. And the decent stone, tablet, or monument, ought to be dear and interesting to us, not as marking the spot where a handful of dust moulders, but rather as the spot where the trumpet of the Archangel shall one day make a stir, and the body of one of God's saints shall come forth to enter upon a glorious immortality.

It is said, '*they made great lamentation over*' Stephen. They might well weep over the loss of such a faithful witness for the truth, such a bold standard-bearer in Christ's army. In those early days of the Church the loss of such a man was a grievous trial. And religion does not stifle natural feelings, it only regulates and controls them. Jesus wept by the grave of Lazarus. We, too, may weep over those

whom we love and lose,—weep, but not murmur,—grieve, but not despair.

Immediately after the violent death of Stephen, *'there arose a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem.'* Foremost amongst the persecutors is mentioned a man whose name has already met us in the story of Stephen's martyrdom. It was there said that the witnesses who accused Stephen of blasphemy, and who therefore had to commence the stoning, *'laid down their clothes at a young man's feet whose name was Saul.'* Saul thus took a leading part in Stephen's death. If he did not himself cast a stone, still he publicly aided and abetted those who did. And now all the sad, solemn, startling circumstances connected with that death do not seem to have checked him in the least. He was bent upon crushing the heresy, as he then thought it, which had so lately sprung up. *'He made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and halving men and women, committed them to prison.'* He never did anything by halves. When he *'verily thought that he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth,'* it was not in a careless, negligent, half-hearted manner that Saul of Tarsus went on his course of opposition and persecution. Like a raging wolf he ravaged Christ's flock. *'Being,'* as he said afterwards himself, *'exceedingly mad'* against the followers of Jesus, he *'persecuted them even to strange cities,' 'compelling them to blaspheme.'*

Saul (afterwards Paul) had been brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, in the strictest conformity to the Jewish ceremonial law. He prided himself on being an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; and according to the straitest sect of his religion a Pharisee. He often read the Old Testament Scriptures ; he knew them well ; but he read them with a veil on his heart,—the veil of prejudice and unbelief. He *could* not, *would* not, believe that the long-promised, long-expected Messiah should come in a state of humiliation, should be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The meek and lowly Jesus of Nazareth was not such a Messiah as Saul wished for and expected, so he rejected Him with scorn. How often afterwards, and how sadly and penitently, did St. Paul refer to this time of ignorance and of bitter enmity against Christ and His people ! ‘I am,’ said he, ‘the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.’ Again and again did the Apostle speak of his early life of fierce opposition to Jesus and His followers, with deep sorrow and self-abasement, acknowledging that it was only the abounding grace of God which had changed him into a preacher of that ‘faith which once he destroyed.’

There is, however, one thing in what St. Paul says of himself that we should carefully notice. He says, ‘I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.’ He ‘verily thought that he was doing

God service,' when he persecuted the Church of God. He was zealous for the law of God, according to his notion of that law. But it is impossible for us, if we reject the Gospel of Christ, to plead that we do so ignorantly. None of us can say that he never knew what Christ had done for him. We all know well what must be the end of a life of unbelief, and carelessness, and sin. With us, to go on living as if Christ had never died for us, must be to 'sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.'

And then there is one other thing which we should notice for our warning and instruction. St. Paul could not by any zeal, and faith, and love in the after part of his life, quite undo the mischief which he had done in his early days. He had 'compelled some to blaspheme;' he had terrified by his threats and ill-usage some seekers after truth; he had kept back many from openly confessing Christ. What a pang all this must have given him when he himself had learnt to love and preach the Gospel of Christ! He could not recall words long ago spoken; he could not live over again those days of ignorance and unbelief in which he had done his best to mislead many now passed into eternity.

Oh, let us not forget that our works and words, in more senses than one, follow us. We may repent, and turn to God, and live a life of faith, and finally rest with Christ in heaven; but things which we

have done, and words which we have spoken, in days back, may be like seeds sown in the hearts of others, ripening into fruits of evil, long after we have passed away to our eternal home. Even Paul the apostle could not undo all the mischief wrought by Saul the persecutor.

God grant that our hearts may be so sanctified by God's Spirit, and our lives so regulated by God's Word, that we may win others to Christ, and never have reason to think sadly in our dying hour of some who but for us (as far as we can see) might have found their way to heaven!

ACTS, viii. 5-12.

5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

8 And there was great joy in that city.

9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before-time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

WE have read of '*a great persecution*' which '*scattered abroad*' the disciples: and we are told that '*they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*' It is an old and true saying, 'The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church.' Here persecution

sent the disciples east and west, north and south, preaching the word. If all had been smooth, and prosperous, and peaceful with them, they might have remained in Jerusalem, clustered together, for mutual comfort and support. But now, for safety's sake, and that they might not attract attention and arouse enmity, they were compelled to separate and fly hither and thither; and wherever each went there he carried the gospel message with him. So was Satan foiled with his own weapons. It was with the Church now as with Israel of old in Egypt, 'the more it was oppressed the more it multiplied and grew.'

And now we are to read something of the work of another of the deacons. We have read of one, Stephen; of his lovely character, useful life, and faithful death. We are now to hear of Philip, sometimes called Philip the Evangelist. It is said of him that he '*went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*' In the verse before we read of his '*preaching the word.*' Further on in the chapter we read of Philip '*preaching Jesus*' to the Ethiopian eunuch. We see then plainly that '*preaching the word,*' and '*preaching Christ,*' are the same things. St. Paul says, 'We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.' It need not make the preaching of

a minister of the Gospel cramped, and limited, and partial, if he preaches Christ. For what is there in God's word that does not in some way point and lead to Christ? What is there that is good and holy which does not in some way come *from* Christ or *through* Him? He is the foundation-stone, the corner-stone, the top-stone of His Church. 'Preaching Christ' wrought, by the power of the Holy Spirit, great things in days of old, we cannot expect great and good results to come from any other kind of preaching now.

Philip was enabled to work great miracles in confirmation of what he said. He was enabled to cast out devils, and heal the sick. This was, as we have seen before, in fulfilment of Christ's own promise, when He sent out His apostles to preach the Gospel. The mere working of a miracle or wonder is not in itself a necessary proof of the man who works it being sent of God. In order to this the miracle must be in confirmation of God's truth; must be accompanied by such teaching as agrees with God's word and will.

The magicians of Egypt wrought wonders in imitation of those wrought by Moses. They too changed their rods into serpents; they turned water into blood; they brought frogs up over the land of Egypt. And so in the verses which we have read we see Simon the sorcerer plainly performing some kind of signs and wonders by which he '*bewitched*

the people of Samaria.' No doubt those magicians of old and Simon wrought their wonders by the help of the devil, who has tried in all ages to counterfeit the works of God. For wise purposes God may permit him to work some wonders, but He has His chain upon the great deceiver all the while. The magicians of Egypt soon reached the end of their tether, and were forced to confess of wonders which they could not work, 'This is the finger of God.' Our Lord tells us of false Christs that should arise, who should work signs and wonders to deceive if it were possible the very elect. We hear of some strange things in these days, and weak-minded people who do not rightly study and believe their Bibles, crave after some intercourse with the spirits of the departed, and profess to think that they have it. He who pretends to bring messages from spirits of the unseen world, and so to reveal what God keeps hidden, is one of two things, *i.e.*, either an impostor, or else a man in league with the devil and instructed by him. In either case he should be avoided and distrusted.

'*The people,*' we read, '*with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake.*' Before, they had all, from the least to the greatest, given heed to Simon. Poor, simple, ignorant creatures, bewitched by his sorceries, and deceived by his pretensions,—they had said and thought of him, that in him there was a manifestation of the mighty power of God.

But now a more excellent way was set before them, and with one accord they gave heed to Philip's words. 'Giving heed' to the word preached is the first step towards receiving, believing, profiting by it. Do we not too often let the word sound in our ears, or pass under our eyes without giving heed to it? And so it comes to pass that the Spirit of God who through the word seeks to teach and bless us is grieved, and the wicked one who seeks to pluck away the seed sown is helped in his cruel work.

The people of Samaria first giving heed to Philip's teaching, then believed it. St. Paul says of Israel of old that 'the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' 'Without faith it is impossible to please God,' or to profit for ourselves. And that is not truly faith which is followed by no good fruits. Let a man truly believe what God's messengers by God's command tell him, and then when he hears of salvation he longs for it;—when he hears of Christ and His love he trusts and loves Him;—when he hears of hell he takes pains to escape it, and of heaven he labours to win it. Further, these people of Samaria having believed, *were baptized both men and women.* 'With the heart,' says St. Paul, 'man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.' Christ believed in must be Christ confessed. We have been baptized in infancy, we have then to confess Christ in confirmation if we

have not been confirmed, and again and again as opportunity offers at His holy table. We must confess Him in our lives as well as with our lips ; confess Him when others are denying Him, supported by the assurance that He will confess us in the day of His glorious appearing.

' There was great joy in that city.' It was not only because the lame walked, the palsied received strength, and unclean spirits were cast out. The joy arose not only from these works of mercy. There was joy in the receiving of the Gospel of the grace of God ; such joy as the prisoner feels when brought out of prison, or the sick when restored to health, or the famishing when abundantly fed. The joy of forgiveness of sin,—the joy of a blessed hope of everlasting life,—the joy of feeling that we have a Friend and Advocate in heaven,—if the Gospel brings us to know and taste such joys as these, why should not a whole city be glad when that Gospel comes to it ? It is the will of our Father in heaven that we should be joyful. If there were more faith there would be more joy. May we walk believingly and so happily until Jesus fulfils His own word, ' I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.'

ACTS, viii. 13-24.

13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

WE have seen how the people of Samaria with one accord gave heed to the things which Philip spake, and received with faith his teaching.

Philip, however, was in his office subordinate to the apostles. So the apostles in Jerusalem hearing of the good work going on in Samaria sent two of their number, Peter and John, down thither, to instruct and establish the new converts, and to pray for them that they might receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Accordingly coming down to Samaria these two apostles, after prayer solemnly laid their hands on the disciples, and they received that which was asked for,—the Holy Spirit's gracious influence, manifestly marked by the gift of tongues or some other outward sign. This passage of Scripture is generally looked upon as furnishing a good argument for the rite of confirmation. We cannot say that the laying on of hands by an apostle was exactly the same as our service of confirmation. A bishop is not an apostle; and we do not ask or expect that miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit should follow the laying on of a bishop's hands, as they did in the case of the apostles. Still it is quite right to say (as in the Confirmation Service) that it is '*after the example*' of the apostles that 'hands are laid' on those who

have been baptized. It is right and reasonable, wise and natural, that one who has been brought to God in infancy and then baptized, should in later years confirm the choice made so early for him, and be solemnly commended to God's guidance and blessing by one of the chief pastors of the Church.

'Simon himself believed also.' But what was his faith worth? Plainly it was a faith of the same kind as that of which St. James speaks, when he says, 'Thou believest that there is one God,—thou doest well;—the devils also believe and tremble.' Simon could not resist the evidence of his senses. He believed that God was stronger than the devil; he believed that Philip was God's messenger; he believed that the words which Philip spoke were true, confirmed as they were by signs following. He thought therefore that it would be most to his advantage to join what seemed to be the winning side; so he attached himself to Philip and *'continued'* with him. Everything shows us that there was no repentance, no love, no amendment of life in Simon's professed faith; so in God's sight it was no faith at all.

Yet the man professed to believe; he gave in his name to Philip as wishing to join the Church; he had the appearance of a true convert, and upon his promises and profession was baptized. Philip might work miracles, but could not read hearts.

When we read such an account as this, do we not see how utterly vain is the attempt, in these days, to find or to make a perfect church? Wheat and tares must stand side by side until the harvest. Our great business is to see that our own hearts are sound and our faith sincere, and not to sit in judgment upon others.

The wretched hollowness and hypocrisy of Simon's profession soon came out. He had watched and wondered at Philip's miracles, and now he saw the two apostles laying their hands on the new converts, and supernatural gifts of the Holy Ghost following. And 'here,' thought Simon, 'is a way in which I may recover the power which I seem to have lost amongst this people. If only I can lay hands upon any one whom I please, in such a way as that he shall receive the Holy Ghost, this will answer fully as well as the tricks and wonders with which I have beguiled them; and I may again have it said of me, "This man is the great power of God."' Simon did not *ask*, did not *want* the Holy Ghost for *himself*. He wanted the power of communicating that Spirit to others. And what he wanted to communicate was not the *grace* of the Spirit, but the *gifts*. No doubt what he offered money *for*, he hoped to make money *by*. If the apostles would let him have their secret, he thought he could make a good profit by it.

What awful sin was there in all this! Sin so

very nearly approaching that sin against the Holy Ghost which has no forgiveness, that we cannot wonder at the strong language used by St. Peter. *'Repent of this thy wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee;'* as though the Apostle would hint that it was only *'perhaps,'* just barely possible that a sin so full of blasphemy against the Spirit might be forgiven.

Have we nothing at all like Simon's sin in these days? The Church of Rome seems to come fearfully near it. For what can be more entirely God's gift than pardon of sin? Yet dispensations, pardons, and indulgences, are regular articles of traffic in the Romish Church; so that it would seem indeed as if she thought that the gift of God could be bought and sold for money.

Neither in Providence nor in grace can the gifts of God be purchased for money. Money cannot buy health, or beauty, or one added half-hour of life; it cannot buy love and happiness; it cannot buy peace of conscience or a hope of everlasting life. Oh, how great is the mercy that what we could never buy is freely offered in the Gospel, without money and without price!

Peter's rebuke of Simon's sin was expressed in fearfully strong language. The man had thought a most blasphemous thought,—that the gift of God, the unspeakably precious gift of the Holy Ghost

might be purchased with money, and he had dared to express this his thought. He had thus shown that he had '*no part nor lot*' with God's people; that '*his heart was not right in the sight of God*;' that it was steeped in the gall of sin, bound with the chain of sin. Yet if Simon had not spoken his thoughts, who could have suspected the horrible evil lurking within? How little can we read others! And oh, how often do others misread us and think perhaps too well of us! May that God to whom all our 'hearts are open,' make us thoroughly sincere and guileless in His sight!

Simon terrified at Peter's severe rebuke asked the apostles to pray for him. Peter had said to him, '*Pray God*,'—pray for thyself, if perhaps thou mayest find forgiveness. Simon asks them to pray for him. It is easy to ask for the prayers of others without praying ourselves. It is common for people when near death, even if they have lived a careless, ungodly life, to send for a minister to 'pray by them,' as it is often called; as if such prayers were a kind of charm that must work some good on the dying person, whether he joined in them or not. Intercession is a plain duty, and a blessed privilege. But all the prayers ever offered will do nothing for a man who does not pray for himself. No minister ever prayed an ungodly man into heaven. Religion is a personal business between each man's soul and God. Each must give in his own account. Oh, let

us be careful to pray, each for our own selves (whilst the time for praying lasts), that God would make clean our hearts within us, and never take His Holy Spirit from us.

ACTS, viii. 25-40.

25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

27 And he arose and went : and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest ?

31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me ? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth :

33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away : and who shall declare his generation ? for his life is taken from the earth.

34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee,

of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some other man ?

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water : and the eunuch said, See, here is water ; what doth hinder me to be baptized ?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still : and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch ; and he baptized him.

39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more : and he went on his way rejoicing.

40 But Philip was found at Azotus : and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.

PHILIP had been very successful in his work amongst the Samaritans. The glad tidings which he preached, as well as the miracles of healing which he wrought, had produced great joy in the city, and large numbers had been there added to the Church. It would be only natural for Philip to go and preach the Gospel, when he had to leave those parts, where he could command large congregations, and see much good fruit resulting from his labours. But God had other work for him to do. He was sent to an out-of-the-way part to teach one man, and when that one particular piece of work was effectually done, he was miraculously removed to carry on His great work of preaching the Gospel elsewhere. An

angel of the Lord was sent to tell Philip where to go. He was to travel southwards, until he came to a road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza, a city of Philistia, south-west of Jerusalem. There were two roads to Gaza—one through towns and villages, the other a shorter cut through the desert. Of these Philip was instructed to take the one least likely, as he might have thought, to give him an opportunity of preaching the Gospel. He soon found out what he was sent this way to do. A lonely traveller, an Ethiopian, was journeying on that particular road just at that time, and God had a purpose of mercy to that man's soul. He was seeking after truth, groping his way amidst much darkness to gospel light, and sooner than he should miss his way, an angel from heaven is employed to send him a teacher.

Does not all this show us the great value of one soul? the great importance which God attaches to one man's conversion? He does not think that angels sent from heaven—miracles wrought—preachers of the Gospel sent hither and thither, are a useless waste of power and goodness, if only one soul is saved by such instrumentality.

The angel came to send Philip to the Ethiopian; he was not sent to teach the man himself. We have seen the same thing before—we shall see it again in the case of Cornelius. There is not an angel in heaven who would not glory in preaching Christ; but whilst angels watch for the effect of the preach-

ing of the Gospel, and rejoice over repenting sinners, they may not preach themselves. Sinners are to preach to sinners; dying men to dying men; that the excellency of the power might be of God alone.

The Ethiopian whom Philip was sent to teach was evidently a proselyte to the Jewish faith. He had been to Jerusalem to worship, no doubt on one of the great yearly festivals. When Philip joined him he was reading the Old Testament Scriptures; reading them, too, *aloud*, as men do sometimes when they wish to understand better what they read. He was a man in a high position of power and authority—a man greatly trusted by a rich queen; yet he was not ashamed to be seen and heard reading God's Word on a journey. Too often the Bible is kept out of sight as if only suitable for Sundays and days of sickness. Many a man would show a kind of false shame if caught reading his Bible on a week-day, in full health and in broad daylight. He would almost feel as if he were going to be ill and to die. But all this is sadly wrong. God's Word is meant to guide us in our busiest hours. We should be happier and safer if we acted more as holy David did, who took God's Word as a 'light to his feet,' and sought from it daily, hourly guidance.

The Ethiopian was reading, when Philip came to him, the fifty-third chapter of the book of the pro-

phet Isaiah. To us that chapter contains the clearest prophecy of the sufferings, death, and burial of the Lord Jesus Christ? But then we have what he had not,—the New Testament account of the accomplishment of that prophecy. It was different with the Ethiopian. To him the words of the prophet seemed dark and strange. Yet he did not give up reading. He did not say, ‘It is all of no use; I cannot understand this; I may as well lay it aside. He went on reading, pondering, and no doubt praying; and just at the right moment a teacher appeared, and light was poured upon the pages he had been patiently studying; he believed, was baptized, and went home rejoicing. So it always is. ‘Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord.’ ‘The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek He will teach His way.’

‘*Understandest thou what thou readest?*’ Philip asked. ‘*And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?*’ These are favourite words with the Church of Rome. The Bible, she says, is useless, or even mischievous, unless a priest is at hand to explain it, and say what meaning the Church puts upon it. But to say this is to cast sad dishonour on God’s Word. We must remember that our position is vastly different from that of the Ethiopian. He had got hold of the writings of Isaiah, and was trying to puzzle out their meaning, without having

ever heard of Him of whom the prophet spoke. But we know all that Philip taught the eunuch, and a great deal more. God's Word has very often been a man's only guide to heaven. If we say Bibles are useless without ministers to explain them, we contradict plain facts, and dishonour God's Word. If we say, on the other hand, that Bibles are enough without human teachers, where these can be had, we dishonour God's own ordinance of preaching, and go in the face of reason and experience, and the words of the Bible itself.

Philip, following the example of all those other early preachers and teachers of whom we have read, took Isaiah's words as his text, and 'preached' unto the man '*Jesus.*' Sweetly the gospel tidings fell on that thirsty heart; the seed found prepared ground. Believing with the heart, and confessing with the mouth '*Jesus Christ*' as '*the Son of God,*' the Ethiopian was admitted by baptism into the Church of Christ, and '*went on his way rejoicing.*'

Joy and peace are closely connected with believing. A light heart, a happy spirit, an easy mind, how are these to be obtained, except by that assurance of God's love which faith in Christ brings into the heart? The Ethiopian soon lost his kind teacher, who was caught up and taken away to do good work elsewhere. But his burden was gone, his ignorance was enlightened, his doubts were dispelled; so, though he had to journey on alone, he

was happy. God help us to believe like him ; to realise more that all Christ did and suffered was really done and borne for us ; then surely as sinners pardoned, and blest, we shall ' go on our way ' to heaven ' rejoicing.'

ACTS, ix. 1-12.

1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

3 And, as he journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

6 And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.

9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the

street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

WE have read before of the man whose wonderful conversion is related in these verses—Saul of Tarsus. It was at his feet that the witnesses, who were the first in the cruel work of stoning Stephen, laid down their clothes. ‘Saul was consenting unto his death.’ He took a leading part in it. He was more than willing to be known as sanctioning it. Then afterwards we read of him as ‘making havoc of the Church, entering into every house, haling men and women, and committing them to prison.’

And now some months (probably a year) had passed since Stephen’s death. The Gospel had been spreading. Scattered Christians had gone far and wide preaching the Word. Samaria had received it with great joy. Even into distant Ethiopia it had been lately carried by a new convert. Saul must have heard of what was going on. Nothing, however, made him pause in his course of mad persecution. All the faith, and meekness, and patience, shown by dying Stephen, had no effect on his proud heart. Or, if any effect, it was only to stir up more fiercely the fire of hatred to the Gospel which burned within him. ‘*Breathing out threatenings and slaughter,*’ he hit upon a new plan to crush, if pos-

sible, this dangerous heresy. He obtained from the high priest letters authorising him to seize in Damascus any Christians that he might find there in the synagogues, and to bring them bound to Jerusalem, to be there tried and sentenced. He had been travelling probably five or six days, and was very near the place where his cruel work of persecution was to begin. In this case (as often before and since) it was just when the need was the greatest, and the danger most pressing, that God interfered on behalf of His people.

Suddenly there shone round about the mad persecutor a light from heaven. He tells us himself that this happened at mid-day, and yet the light which shined was 'above the brightness of the sun.' That dazzling glory surrounded the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. St. Paul's companions did not see the Saviour; they only saw a great light, but no distinct form. St. Paul, however, tells us most plainly that he saw the Lord Jesus. In this chapter Barnabas, seeking to overcome the natural fears and misgivings of the disciples, explained to them how Saul '*had seen the Lord in the way*, and that He had spoken to him.

Then whilst Saul, overwhelmed and blinded by that brightness, had fallen to the ground, there came this voice to him from 'the excellent glory,'—'*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?*' St. Paul tells us, in the twenty-sixth chapter, that the voice spoke to

him 'in the Hebrew tongue.' The words were distinct and plain. That there might be no possible mistake, he was addressed twice by name, '*Saul, Saul!*' Evidently his name, his life, his work, were known in heaven. He is asked, too, what must have seemed to him a strange question. He had thought that he was doing God service in hunting out, imprisoning, killing, if he could, the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. That same Jesus he regarded as a deceiver. And now to his amazement a voice from heaven asks him why he persecutes One whose glory he cannot bear to look upon.

'*Why persecutest thou Me?*' Not *mine*, but *Me*. How plainly do the words set before us the close and intimate union there is betwixt Christ and His people. The Head feels what the members suffer. 'Inasmuch as thou doest it to one of the least of these My brethren, thou doest it unto Me.'

'*Who art Thou, Lord?*' asked Saul, in wonder and alarm. 'It is the Lord who speaks; that voice can come from none else; but how can I persecute the Lord in heaven?' Then came words which might well pierce Saul's heart, '*I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*' Just as the goaded ox wounds itself by kicking against the sharp goad which urges it onwards, so is it the height of folly and madness for thee to fight against God, to attempt to resist Omnipotence. Jesus of Nazareth is the Lord of glory.

Thou persecutest Him in persecuting His people, and so doing must be crushed.'

'And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' This, when asked with sincerity, is always the first question of an anxious and awakened heart. 'What must I do to be saved?' What is Thy will concerning me? Saul soon received an answer to his question. He was told to go into the city, and there wait for further instructions. *'The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.'* They saw a light, but not the glorious person who spoke. They heard a voice, but could not distinguish words spoken to Saul only.

Dazzled and blinded by the glory, Saul rose from the earth unable to find his way. He was led by the hand into Damascus, and when there was three days without sight and without food. Who can imagine the thoughts which filled Saul's mind during those three days of darkness? What sad and humbling recollections of Stephen's patience, and meekness, and faith! What painful remembrances of many whom he had compelled to blaspheme! What fears for himself! Meanwhile, through those hours of fasting and blindness, there rose up, from the heart and lips of the anxious man, a cry for mercy, guidance, and peace.

Nor did he ask in vain. God sent him a faithful teacher to comfort and instruct him. In the

exact directions given to Ananias how to find Saul, how are we reminded of the truth, acknowledged by all, but felt by few, that all the little details of our lives are known and marked by God. Such a street—such a house, belonging to such a person—there will the man needing instruction be found. 'When thou wast under the fig-tree,' said Christ to Nathanael, 'I saw thee.' All day long, and everywhere, God's eye marks and follows us.

'Behold he prayeth.' Saul had made, as he thought, many long prayers before this time. But this was the first time his heart had really risen to God. True prayer is the breath of a new-born soul. Do we truly pray? Or do we say words to which our hearts do not respond? We see in Saul's case, as in the case of thousands more that cries for grace and mercy, however broken and mixed with doubts and fears, if only coming from the heart, shall be heard and answered by Him who has never said to any, 'Seek ye My face in vain.'

ACTS, ix. 13-22.

13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel;

16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said, Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews, which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

SAUL of Tarsus (afterwards Paul the Apostle) had, as we remember, been arrested in his persecuting journey by a vision of glory, and a voice from heaven. And now, within the walls of that city to which he came to persecute, imprison, and slay God's saints, he was waiting—humbled, anxious, and penitent—for comfort and guidance from Him whom he had been persecuting in the persons of His members. For three days he remained fasting and sightless. Then a messenger of comfort was sent to him. The Lord bade Ananias to go and seek him out, to restore his bodily sight, and give him such instruction as he needed.

'Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name.' There is a beautiful simplicity and naturalness about the answer of Ananias. It was not that the good man was unwilling to do the Lord's bidding and to carry the Lord's message. But to go to Saul of Tarsus, well known as a savage and bitter persecutor, whose name was in the mouth of all the Christians round as one who made havoc of the Church, and who was known to come to Damascus armed with authority to seize and imprison all who called on the name

of Christ,—it seemed to Ananias that to go to such a man was like going straight into a lion's den. Surely, he thought, the Lord cannot mean this; he cannot mean to send me to Saul.

The fears and doubts, however, of good Ananias were soon banished. *'The Lord said unto him, Go thy way : for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel : for I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake.'* In these words the Lord gave a kind of foreshadowing of the Apostle Paul's future history. He was to testify the Gospel of the grace of God before Jews and Gentiles, kings and common people; and in this great work he was to meet with reproach, and suffering, and danger, with bonds, imprisonment, and death, for Christ's sake. No one, then, could think or say that it was for earthly ease, or gain, or honour, that Saul changed his religion and his life. From the first he was taught the lesson which he himself afterwards taught to others,—that all who 'will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.' There was a change,—a great change in the man. In a very short time the whole city of Damascus was ringing with the story of it. And yet he who was so changed was told from the first, that in his altered life he had suffering and danger before him. Does not all this show that a new principle of love to Christ had been implanted in his heart, such as made labour

for Christ's sake easy and suffering sweet? Does it not show that from this time forward he began to walk by faith and not by sight? that the eyes of his soul were opened to see things unseen, so that he could look over and beyond light afflictions which were temporal to an exceeding and eternal weight of glory? When He called St. Paul, the Lord gave him notice that he would have to suffer much for His sake. Thus he did, as it were, bid him to count the cost. And St. Paul *did* count the cost, and he found that all earthly things, advantages and disadvantages, gains or losses, sufferings or successes, life or death, were as nothing, as dung or dross, as the dust of the balance, less than a feather in the scale, compared with the knowledge of Christ, the love of Christ, the service of Christ, and eternal life with Christ in His kingdom above. Oh, that we might all feel and act like him !

Ananias having had his fears removed by what the Lord said to him, went his way to the house of Judas to seek for Saul; and entering in he put his hands on him, saying, '*Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightst receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.*' '*Brother Saul!*' Only three days before Ananias in addressing the same man would have had to say, 'Persecutor Saul,—blasphemer Saul,—cruel wolf ravaging Christ's flock,—bitter destroyer of the faith;—anything,

indeed, rather than '*Brother Saul.*' But now all had been changed. He who had been one of the bitterest enemies of Christ and His Church, had passed over into the ranks of His faithful soldiers; had become a fellow-citizen of the saints and a member of the household of God. '*The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest,*' said Ananias, '*hath sent me.*' St. Paul often alludes to his having himself with his own eyes seen the Lord Christ, and having received direct from Him his commission as an apostle and preacher of the Gospel.

Whilst Ananias put his hands on Saul, '*there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith.*' The miracle thus wrought on his eyes, which had been dimmed by the surpassing glory of the light from heaven, was a type and figure of the opening of the eyes of the soul,—of the shining of divine light into a heart long darkened by unbelief, prejudice, and error. And then, though he had been so miraculously called,—though a commission to preach the Gospel had been given him directly by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, still he must pass through the ordinary door of admission into Christ's Church by baptism. He must seek in baptism the seal of pardoning mercy shown to him. In that holy rite, he must give himself openly to the service of Him whom he had so lately learnt to honour and confess.

188 *The Persecutor Preaching Christ.*

After this, a few days of friendly intercourse with the disciples at Damascus (those very disciples whom he had come to hunt and kill) having confirmed his faith, Paul began '*preaching Christ in the synagogues that he is the Son of God.*' This was just like all that we read and hear of him. Many in Paul's circumstances would have said, 'I have so lately opposed the religion of Christ that I cannot with any decency come forward all at once as its defender; I am sorry for what I have done, but I cannot say so all at once in the hearing of the world; let me retire from notice for awhile, and at some future time confess the change in my views and feelings.' This was not St. Paul's plan. *At once*, and before those who knew what he was and what he had come to do, he would declare that all his life up to this time had been a grand mistake; that He whom he had blasphemed as an impostor was in truth the eternal Son of God.

No wonder that '*all that heard him were amazed.*' There might well be a stir in Damascus about such a strange transformation. The lion was turned into a lamb. He who came to destroy the faith was now busy preaching it. '*He preached Christ.*' This work St. Paul began within a few days of his conversion, and in this he persevered to the very end of his life of toil and peril. It was about twenty-four years after his conversion that the Apostle wrote thus to the Corinthian Church, 'I determined not to know

anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.' Christ living,—Christ dying,—Christ rising again,—Christ interceding,—Christ the propitiation for our sins,—our pattern,—our hope,—our refuge,—Christ the author and finisher of our faith,—Christ our all in all, this was ever the great theme on which St. Paul loved to dwell. From the hour that he saw Christ, Christ was everything to him. He served the Lord Christ, confessed Him, honoured Him, preached Him, and had an earnest desire to depart and be for ever with Him. And now for a long time this desire has been fully satisfied. May we prize Christ in some measure at least as St. Paul did, then we, too, like him shall be 'for evermore with the Lord!'

ACTS, ix. 23-31.

23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him :

24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples : but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

28 And he was with them coming in and going out of Jerusalem.

29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians : but they went about to slay him.

30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cæsarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified ; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

IN these verses we see the tables altogether turned. The persecutor becomes himself the per-

secuted. Saul of Tarsus, altogether changed as he *now* was, was too powerful a witness to the truth of the Gospel of Christ not to be hated, and if possible got rid of, by the unbelieving Jews. When our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead, he was such a striking evidence of Christ's power that the Jews consulted even to put him to death. We should have thought that in the case of Lazarus, all who saw the man restored from the grave would acknowledge the worker of such a miracle to be the Christ. And in the case of Saul, spiritually raised from a death of sin, we might well have expected that all who had known him before and saw and heard him now would say and feel, 'Some great power has been at work here; there must be *something*, there must be *much* in what this man says as to the cause of such a change, at least let us listen carefully to what he has to tell us.' Not at all. 'Get rid of Lazarus, get rid of Saul,' say these men; 'they are troublesome witnesses to the truth; and the truth we will not receive.' What a solemn lesson is there for us here! We are often ready to think that if we saw signs and wonders we should be constrained to believe. But God gives us all that is needed to warn, instruct, and counsel us. The Bible,—the preaching of His Word,—the secret striving of the Spirit,—warnings of Providence,—whispers of conscience,—services,—sacraments,—religious books,—religious friends;—if all these are in vain, we need

not look and wait for anything more. *'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.'* (St. Luke, xvi. 31.)

As the Jews watched the gates of the city of Damascus day and night to kill Paul, the disciples, anxious for his safety, lowered him by night in a basket from the window of a house over-hanging the city wall, and so he made his escape and set forth to Jerusalem. To this escape St. Paul alludes in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians. (2 Cor. xi. 32, 33.)

'When Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples : but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.' We can easily understand the fear of the disciples and their hesitation about receiving Saul amongst them. He was longing for Christian intercourse and sympathy, but those whom he wished to associate with feared and suspected him. It was very natural. The remembrance of their beloved Stephen, at whose death Saul had assisted, and of many more whom he had dragged to prison, made it hard for them to believe that this cruel persecutor was now an altered man, engaged in preaching the faith which once he destroyed. Then it was that Barnabas came forward with his friendly offices. Explaining to the apostles how Saul had seen the Lord Jesus and had heard His voice, and how, as a proof of a great change wrought in him, *'he had preached boldly at Damascus in the*

name of Jesus;' he so restored their confidence that they gladly received him, and he mixed with them in their solemn assemblies and in their daily ministrations. Probably Barnabas and Saul had known something of one another before this. Barnabas was of Cyprus and Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia, no very great distance from that island; and it is not at all unlikely that Barnabas had studied in the schools of Tarsus, and there met Saul. We have heard something of Barnabas before this. In the fourth chapter of the Acts he is named as one who threw his property into the common store for the good of the Church. In the eleventh chapter we have a very high character given of Barnabas, as being '*a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.*' We find him on several occasions Paul's companion in the work of the ministry; once expressly selected as such by the Holy Ghost Himself, who said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' It was surely most natural that Paul should cleave to and love the society of the man who, when he was doubted and suspected by the disciples, had come forward as his friend, and had gained for him the confidence and companionship of the Church.

When we see the benefit and blessing which the Christian kindness of Barnabas proved to Saul just in the time of his need, may we not learn a lesson as to the duty of helping on in the right way those

whose faces are for the first time set heavenwards? Young people anxious about their souls, awakened to some spiritual concern, beginning to 'feel after God if haply they may find him,' are often discouraged by the coldness and suspicions of older Christians. To think and say, 'It will not last; it is mere feeling and not faith,' may sound very wise, but is often sadly uncharitable. It would be far better and wiser, more like good Barnabas,—nay, more like Christ, to think the best and hope the best, and to try our best to help beginners forward. We may be mistaken now and then. Better this than run the risk of breaking a bruised reed, and turning back to the world and sin one poor wanderer who would fain set out for heaven.

And now, whilst Saul, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, was compelled for his life's safety to be sent away by the brethren to Tarsus, it pleased God to grant a season of rest and peace to the Churches in Judæa, and Galilee, and Samaria. They were '*edified*,'—built up, that is,—strengthened, established in their holy faith. Nor was this all. They '*were multiplied*.' They grew; they gathered in many members from surrounding districts. And we cannot wonder at this happy, prosperous condition when we read that '*they walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.*' There was a careful consistency of conduct amongst the members of these Churches, a holy fear of the

Lord influenced their acts of worship and their daily life; and the comforting power of the Holy Ghost was sought and obtained. Holy fear and heavenly comfort go well together. Indeed, we cannot look for the latter if there be nothing of the former. 'The comfort of the Holy Ghost;' this is not mere passing warmth of feeling; it is an abiding spring of peace, and hope, and joy. It was not in apostolic times only that there could be such happy and useful walking as is here spoken of. Let us pray for more of the reviving, comforting help of the Holy Spirit. Let us not be content with creeping timidly and doubtfully towards heaven (even if we are doing that), now that Christ has said, '*Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.*'

ACTS, ix. 32-43.

32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

33 And there he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.

34 And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole : arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas : this woman was full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.

37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died : whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber : and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed ; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes : and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.

43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

GOD having graciously granted to the Churches a season of rest, Peter took advantage of those quiet times to make a circuit amongst them, in order to strengthen and comfort the disciples. In the course of his journeyings he *'came down to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.'* *'There he found a certain man named Æneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.'* A man who had been bed-ridden eight years, sick of the palsy,—we all know how hopeless such a case is. It does not appear that either Æneas, or his friends for him, asked for any help from Peter. All hope of a cure had been long given up; and the sick man no doubt only looked for such spiritual consolation as an apostle might give, and a humble disciple of Christ would be glad to receive.

'Peter,' coming to the sick man, *'said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise and make thy bed.'* Here is not one word about Peter himself. The apostle does not even say, *'In the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, I bid thee rise;'* though he might well have done so. He is quite content that the servant should be lost

sight of in the Master; that he should be nothing and Christ everything. It was the sin of Moses that, when God bade him to *speak* to the rock in Horeb to give forth water for Israel's thirst, he *smote* it and uttered the angry and self-glorifying words, 'Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch water for you out of the rock?' as though it were by his own power that the wonder was to be wrought. Of such a sin St. Peter, by God's grace, kept very clear. '*Æneas*,' he said, '*Jesus Christ maketh thee whole*,'—*Jesus Christ*, not Peter. *Æneas* could hardly fail to have heard of Christ's miracles. He was ill at the very time that Jesus went about in Judæa and Galilee healing all manner of diseases. And it is likely that he had often wished Christ back again on earth that he might ask from him a cure. Now he learns that the Saviour's having gone up into heaven takes nothing from His healing power; that He can reach and bless the needy just as effectually as when in His bodily presence He moved up and down amongst them.

In the case of *Æneas*, as in miracles wrought personally by our Lord, we cannot help being struck with the quickness and completeness of the cure. '*Arise*,' said St. Peter, '*and make thy bed*.' The man obeyed at once. Commonly in such cases, if there were recovery at all it would be very slow and gradual. Strength would only return by degrees. It might well astonish all who knew *Æneas* to see a

man, eight years palsied and bed-ridden, rise up at a word sound and strong, and begin making his bed. But so it was. God's work is perfect. His mercies are not dealt out scantily. He does not bless by halves. When He pardons it is from 'ALL sin' that He cleanses. When He supplies the need of His people, it is 'ALL their need' that He supplies.

But we have yet another miracle wrought by St. Peter recorded in the verses before us. The first miracle was wrought on behalf of a long-afflicted Christian man; the second on behalf of a good, useful Christian woman. Dorcas is said to have been '*full of good works and alms-deeds which she did.*' Amongst other acts of love and kindness she made clothing for the poor, especially for widows. We do not know if Dorcas was a widow. It is very likely that she was. At any rate it seems quite plain that she had no husband alive at the time that she died, for there is no kind of reference to one. And there is nothing to make us think she was a rich woman. She is simply spoken of as '*a disciple,*' a member of the Church at Joppa; and a kind-hearted, charitable helper of the poor and needy. She relieved the afflicted, comforted the widow, clothed the naked. So all loved her whilst she lived, and wept for her when she died. And it must have been a touching scene, when, round about her corpse, as it lay ready for burial in an upper chamber, stood widows, for whom those cold, stiff hands

had once laboured, weeping and saying one and another, 'This she made for me; these garments are the fruit of her loving toil; we shall hear her kind voice and see her gentle smile no more.'

When Dorcas was dead, as Lydda, where St. Peter had just been the means of restoring Æneas to health, was only about six miles from Joppa, the disciples sent two men to St. Peter requesting him to come to them. In all likelihood they simply wished for, and expected comfort and counsel, under the sore trouble which had fallen on the Church at Joppa. St. Peter came as desired, and entering into the chamber of death put forth the mourners, and, alone with God, prayed for the restoration of Dorcas to life. His prayer was answered by a firm persuasion wrought in his mind that she should be so restored. It must have been so, or the apostle would not have dared to give the command, '*Ta-bitha, arise.*' The spirit returned to its forsaken dwelling; the eyes sealed in death were opened again; the stiffened corpse moved once more. She that had been dead '*sat up.*' Then St. Peter gave her his hand, and kindly and tenderly lifted her up. We can a little conceive the joy and astonishment of the saints and widows when (re-called into that upper chamber) they found her whom they had left a helpless corpse ready to greet them once again with her friendly smile, and to enter once more upon her works of usefulness.

Now we are taught again and again in the Bible, and by all faithful ministers of the Gospel of Christ, that it is 'by grace' that 'we are saved, through faith.' If there must be a short and complete answer given at once to the question, 'What must I do to be saved?' here it is, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' But then we must remember that 'faith without works is dead.' And it is vain to say, 'I believe in Jesus Christ,' if all the while we live an idle, useless, selfish life,—the life of a butterfly or a bird, not doing any good to the souls and bodies of our fellow-creatures. We may not be rich—most probably good Dorcas was not—but we can do something for others. Some of us could sew for the poor as she did; some could read to the old and ignorant; some could teach in Sundays-schools; all could do something to help others to heaven, and to make them happy. And our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that a gift so inexpensive as a cup of cold water given to a disciple in His name shall not be despised; that He will say at last to those who have visited the sick and comforted the needy, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.'

ACTS, x. 1-8.

1 There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band,

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.

3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter:

6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

WE read, in the closing verses of the last chapter, of the miraculous restoration of Æneas to health, and of Dorcas to life. Great and blessed results followed these two miracles. At Lydda and Saron very many who had long known Æneas as a help-

less cripple, and saw him so miraculously recovered, '*turned to the Lord.*' And throughout all Joppa also the restoration of Dorcas to life was known, and there, too, '*many believed in the Lord.*'

In the chapter before us we have an instructive and encouraging account of the gathering of a Gentile into the Church of Christ. Our Lord had bidden His disciples to 'go forth and teach *all nations.*' Still their views were dim, and their minds narrow. It needed a special revelation to explain to them God's gracious purpose, that the Gentiles should be admitted into the household of God. Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was the one chosen by God to be the first instance, after our Lord's ascension, of a Gentile called into the Church.

Cornelius probably belonged to a Roman family of some rank and station. He was a soldier, captain of a hundred men. He had no doubt come to some knowledge of the true God through acquaintance with the Jews, amongst whom he lived, and so he had cast away the idols which his countrymen worshipped, and up to the measure of the knowledge which he possessed he sought and served God.

He was '*a devout man.*' He had learnt to worship the God of Israel, and did so with reverence and humility, not forsaking the assemblies of God's people, as far as one uncircumcised could join in their services.

He '*feared God.*' His religion was not taken up to gain the good opinion of men. It had its root in that holy fear of God which is said to be '*the beginning of wisdom.*'

Nor was Cornelius content to serve God alone. '*He feared God with all his house.*' In this respect he was like holy Abraham, of whom God said that He '*knew him, that he would command his children and his household after him that they should keep the way of the Lord.*' The '*devout*' captain had '*a devout soldier that waited on him continually.*' Religion spread in the family of Cornelius, from the head to the members.

Further, we are told that he '*gave much alms to the people.*' He was of good report among all the nation of the Jews as a liberal man, whose kindly heart and open hand were always ready to minister to the necessities of the poor and needy around him.

Once more, he '*prayed to God alway.*' He lived in the habit of prayer. He felt that he knew but little, and longing to know more, he cried continually, '*That which I see not teach Thou me.*' His light was very dim, but he knew enough to rely for his acceptance with God upon the merits of some Mediator, coming or come. That his prayers were acceptable we know, because they were accepted. Thousands of Old Testament saints offered acceptable prayer who had very dim and doubtful views of a

Messiah. Cornelius was not rejected because his faith was feeble, and his views misty. His whole heart was lifted up to God. He honestly and earnestly desired the things which he asked for.

And now we have to notice the answer given to his prayers. It was about three o'clock one afternoon, and therefore broad daylight, and most probably when Cornelius was engaged in prayer, that suddenly a light gleamed before him, and he saw standing near him a bright angel, who addressed him by his name. Naturally enough Cornelius was at first afraid. The best of men have felt the same in the presence of a messenger newly come from heaven. However, these feelings of natural fear did not prevent him from asking calmly, 'What is it, Lord?' and then listening patiently to the angel's instructions. His must have been a heart free from guile, a clear conscience, a single eye, or he could not have received with such undisturbed attention the angel's message. The angel came to direct the good man to send for Peter, who should tell him what he ought to do. And here again, just as in the story of St. Paul's conversion, and the sending of Ananias to him, we are reminded how all the little circumstances of our daily lives are known to God, and noticed by Him. The town where Peter was then sojourning—the name of his host—the exact position of the house where he lodged—the angel mentioned all these. We little realize how all

the ins and outs of our lives—our places of **abode**—our occupations—the friends we meet—the books we read—are all known to the Lord of angels, and in great measure, too, no doubt to those unseen spirits who move about us on ministries from heaven.

But if the angel came to Cornelius, why did not *he* tell the Roman centurion ‘what he ought to do?’ Why did not *he* preach the Gospel to him? Because, as we have seen before, the high privilege of being ambassadors for Christ is not entrusted to *angels*, but to *men*. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest preacher that the world ever saw, was a man, and He has chosen men to be His messengers. St. Paul says, ‘We have this treasure (*i. e.* the Gospel to be preached) in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be of God.’ When hearts are moved and melted under the preaching of the Gospel, men cannot help seeing that the power is of God alone, when the preacher is not some bright archangel, but a weak and insignificant man ‘of like passions, with themselves.’

It is a vain and profitless thing to ask whether Cornelius could or could not have been saved if the angel had not come to him, and Peter had not taught him. We know that in Peter’s own account of the whole transaction, he represents the angel as directing Cornelius to send for Peter, who should ‘*tell him words by which he and all his house should be saved.*’ God would not have sent an angel to him if it were not

needful, and if needful He would not fail to send him. He had begun a good work in the Roman, and He would perfect it. Cornelius plainly needed a clear knowledge of the Gospel. He was 'feeling after God, if haply he might find Him,'—he was 'following on to know the Lord,'—so then there shall be two visions, one to himself and one to Peter—the appearance of an angel—the ministry of an apostle,—sooner than his prayer shall be unanswered, and his soul unsaved.

We have far clearer light than Cornelius had before Peter came to him, let us be very careful to act up to it. 'To him that hath shall more be given.' 'The meek God will guide in judgment, the meek will He teach His way.'

ACTS, x. 9-20.

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour :

10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten : but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,

11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth :

12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common.

16 This was done thrice : and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,

18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.

19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.

WE have seen, in the first verses of this chapter, how God prepared the mind of the Roman centurion Cornelius to seek and receive instruction from Peter, in the verses before us we see how Peter was prepared to give it.

Our Lord, when first sending out His apostles to preach, had said to them, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Before He left the world this commission was thus extended, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature;' still it was added, '*beginning at Jerusalem.*' St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, speaks of it as a 'mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel.' (Eph. iii. 5, 6.) Peter then, and his fellow apostles, had a strong conviction that, as the Jews had long been God's chosen people, the blessings of the Gospel were to be almost, if not entirely, confined to them. Their Master's own words had seemed to encourage such notions; and they (Jews as they

were) seemed to have no right to go outside of their own nation in their offers of everlasting life.

Now, however, God designed to teach Peter a different lesson. Cornelius was a Gentile, just as we are, and he was to be the first-fruits of a large and blessed ingathering. The men whom Cornelius had sent to seek Peter were drawing near to the end of their journey about noon on the day following that on which the angel came to him, when Peter went up on the flat roof of his house, for a time of retirement and prayer. There, looking out on the sea and sky only, he held communion with his God. After a time he became hungry, and whilst food was being prepared for him *'he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill and eat.'* In order that we may enter rightly into the meaning of this vision, we must remember the very strict directions given in the Levitical law as to what *might* be eaten, and what *might not*. These are fully given in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Leviticus. Amongst the creatures shown to Peter in the vision were some that he had been taught all his life to regard as 'unclean,' and therefore to avoid. So, when he was bidden to *kill and*

But these amongst others, he pleaded in excuse for not doing so that, in obedience to the law of Moses, he had '*never eaten anything common or unclean.*' Then came the answer, '*What God hath cleansed that call not thou common.*' Three times this strange vision was repeated, in order to impress it more strongly on Peter's mind. What all this meant we can see very plainly, and Peter too soon found out. It was all to teach him and us that 'the handwriting of ordinances' (as St. Paul calls it), the old directions under the Levitical law, 'touch not,—taste not,—handle not,' were taken away; that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was now removed, and that to all alike, Jews and Gentiles, Barbarian, Scythian, bond and free, were to be offered the blessings of salvation through one common Redeemer.

Whilst Peter was musing upon the vision, and considering what it meant, the men sent by Cornelius were asking for him at the door of his house. Meanwhile he was by the Holy Spirit informed of their coming, told that it was He who had sent them, and bidden to go with them without hesitation. The men told their story, and all became plain to Peter's mind. Putting together the vision which he had just seen thrice repeated,—the warning of the Holy Spirit,—the arrival of the messengers from Cornelius just when he was pondering over the meaning of that which God had shown him,

—the appearance of the angel to Cornelius, and the earnest desire of that good man for further instruction,—Peter saw clearly the path of duty, which was to go at once and carry the Gospel message to the Roman centurion, and to admit him, Gentile though he was, to a full participation in Gospel blessings.

We cannot but be struck with the wonderful and beautiful manner in which one part of God's work fits in with another; the skill with which teacher and taught are brought together; the preparation which takes place in different minds at a distance from each other, such that when they meet, one may impart and the other receive spiritual benefit.

But besides this let us not overlook the lesson taught to Peter in the words, '*What God hath cleansed that call not thou common.*' The words taught him that he should not hesitate to go and preach Christ to an uncircumcised Gentile. We do not need just that lesson. We are Gentiles ourselves, and therefore are not likely to scruple about the Gospel being preached to others beside Jews. But in other ways we may need to be cautioned against calling what God hath cleansed 'common and unclean.' Thus if we see any one whose consistent Christian life gives good evidence of a heart sanctified by the Spirit of God, we are not to condemn him, and call him 'common and unclean' because

he does not worship God just in our own way, and in our company. What God has 'cleansed' we must take heed lest we call 'common and unclean.' Where He has pardoned it is not for us to condemn.

Again, we are too ready to make our family relationships excuses for neglecting God's service. Now it is God who 'setteth the solitary in families.' 'A prudent wife is from the Lord.' 'Children are an heritage and gift that cometh from' Him. And He has intended these good gifts to draw us *to* Him and not *from* Him. But if we make our family connexions an excuse for a careless, ungodly life; if we say that we cannot read our Bibles, and pray, and go to church, because of our children and friends, we make God's bounty an occasion for sin, and call 'that which God hath cleansed' 'common and unclean.'

In the same way as to labour, poverty, affliction, pain, sickness, bereavement, God has graciously provided that all these, if we will but use them rightly, shall help us towards heaven. But if *labour* about the meat that perisheth is to make us lose sight of the bread that endureth to everlasting life; if *cares* are to choke the good seed of the word, and *pain* is to make us murmur and distrust, then what God would hallow and bless to His own glory and our good is perverted by our foolishness into an occasion for falling, and we reckon that 'common and

214 *God in all things to be glorified.*

unclean' which God has 'cleansed.' Care need not make us careful as long as we are allowed and bidden to cast it upon God. Sickness need not make us repine or despair as long as 'whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.' May we be enabled more and more to learn and practise the great lesson, 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.'

ACTS, x. 21-33.

21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

24 And the morrow after they entered into Cæsarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.

26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.

28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing,

31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.

32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

BOTH in the case of Peter and of Cornelius, we see the utmost readiness to obey God's instructions when once understood. Readiness to obey proves the sincerity of prayer. To follow heavenly guidance is the only safe evidence of such guidance having been honestly desired, and earnestly prayed for.

From Joppa to Cæsarea was a journey of two days or nearly so. How anxiously must the centurion have waited and longed for the coming of the appointed instructor, whom an angel had been sent to point out to him! He would not, however, enjoy the benefit and blessing of such instruction alone, so he had gathered together his kinsmen and near friends to share it with him. They too had souls to be saved, understandings to be enlightened, minds which needed teaching. So Cornelius had collected them together to meet Peter and to hear

his message. There is a lesson here for us. If we are in earnest about our own souls,—if we seek after the truth and love it,—if we desire for ourselves more of the Holy Spirit's teaching, do we do anything for our kinsmen, and near friends, and neighbours? Are we trying to lead them to heaven? Do we endeavour to bring them under the sound of the Gospel? Are we faithful in reproving their sins? Do we plead with them that they would give all diligence to make their salvation sure? The Christian in a right frame of mind will not be content to go to heaven alone; he will anxiously seek to take others with him.

It was not perhaps to be wondered at that when Peter entered into the house of Cornelius, that good man '*fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.*' He might well think that special honour was due to one, whom an angel was sent to instruct him to send for. Peter, however, like his fellow-apostles, most anxious to disclaim honour to which he was not entitled, '*took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.*' How different in every respect was the apostle's conduct from that of him who claims to be Peter's successor, and Christ's representative; who exalts himself as a 'lord over God's heritage,' and demands homage due to God alone!

And now having entered into the house, in the presence of the large company assembled, Peter and Cornelius told each his story, as to the manner in

which God had brought about their meeting. And in this manner did Cornelius conclude what he had to say, '*Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*' How vastly different from what it is would be the result of our gatherings together in the house of God, if the spirit of the worshippers were that of good Cornelius! If we all deeply felt when we go up to worship, 'We are all here present before God,' in His presence, beneath His eye; before God who 'walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks,' and 'hath the stars in his right hand,' and searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins; before God who waiteth to be gracious, and is ever ready to hear and answer prayer. We are present before God *to hear all things that are commanded* His ministers from Him. Not from mere curiosity or custom,—not to pass away an idle hour,—not to gaze at our fellow-worshippers,—not to quiet an otherwise uneasy conscience,—not from motives so low and earthly as these have we come together; but to meet God,—to seek His face,—to learn His will,—to implore His mercy. And although it be a human voice to which we listen,—although the truth spoken is of necessity mixed up with much of ignorance and imperfection, yet the minister, if faithful, is the accredited 'messenger of the Lord of hosts;' his message therefore demands a careful and reverential hearing.

We shall soon see, as we go forward with the

story, what blessed consequences followed Peter's address. We cannot wonder at them when we know in what frame of mind, with what thoughts and feelings that address was received. The good seed fell on prepared ground, the water of life was offered to thirsting hearts. Oh, may we more and more in reading God's word, in hearing the Gospel preached, in every act of worship, realize God's presence, and say with devout and earnest hearts, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear.'

ACTS, x. 34-48.

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons :

35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all) :

37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ;

38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him.

39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem : whom they slew and hanged on a tree :

40 Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly ;

41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.

45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,

47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

WE have in these verses Peter's sermon addressed to Cornelius and his friends; a sermon not long, but very complete and comprehensive. The first point which the apostle touches upon is the freeness and fulness of the Gospel message. He had been accustomed to think that he must only preach the Gospel to the Jews, but now God had taught him differently. '*Of a truth,*' he says, '*I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.*' This was clearing the way for what was to follow. He was going to give in a few sentences the sum and substance of the Gospel; he was going to tell of what Christ had done, and to make in Christ's name an offer of remission of sins. To whom is he to tell those glad tidings? To whom is he to make that offer? A few days back Peter would have said, 'To Jews only.' Now, however, he speaks differently. 'God is no respecter

of persons.' His love has broken down every barrier. As St. Paul has it, 'There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.' 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Each of us then is included in the Saviour's gracious invitation, 'Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth.' Christ 'tasted death for every man,' and as for *each* he died, so *to each* he offers freely and sincerely the blessings which His death has purchased.

We know then to whom the Gospel *ought* to come,—to whom it *does* come. What is the substance of it? It consists of great facts, and the great and blessed results which flow out of them. The life,—the ministry,—the work,—the death,—the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the great blessing of forgiveness of sins flowing out of His atoning sacrifice, this was the substance of Peter's sermon,—this is the sum of the Gospel message.

First, Peter speaks of the preparation of Christ for his priestly and prophetic office. 'God,' he says, 'anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power.' This exactly agrees with the language of the prophet Isaiah in which the great Messiah says of Himself, 'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to

proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.' (Isa. lxi. 1.) These words Jesus claimed as belonging to Himself, and showed how they were fulfilled *of* and *in* Him. Upon Him the Spirit was poured out without measure. And *from* Christ, *through* Christ, *for* Christ's sake, the comforting, sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit flow forth now upon His Church. Like the precious ointment, the holy anointing oil which, poured on Aaron's head, went down to the skirts of his garments, the Holy Spirit poured upon the head of our great High Priest spreads to those who are as the skirts of His garments; to the feeblest, neediest members of His Church. 'O gracious Saviour,' let us each pray, 'let that holy anointing Spirit rest upon me!'

Such being Christ's preparation for His work, what was that work? There is first the *life*. What was it? He '*went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.*' He healed the sick,—He gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf,—He cleansed the leper,—He made the widow's heart to sing for joy, restoring to life her only son. 'For this purpose He was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil.' So He went about setting Satan's captives free,—casting out unclean spirits,—releasing those whom Satan had bound in bands of infirmity and pain. There was not a town or a village through which His blessed feet passed,

but He left there traces and tokens of His mercy and power; left 'the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.' '*He went about doing good.*' He never lost a day or an hour. '*God was with him,*' God was in him. The Son of Man was also the Son of God.

Strange indeed it seems that such a public benefactor as Jesus of Nazareth should have been hated and persecuted instead of being loved and honoured. His own words, however, explain the wonder. The 'world hated Him because He testified of it that its deeds were evil.' So although He, the Prince of Peace, made peace by the blood of the cross, preached peace, bequeathed peace at parting, still notwithstanding all His works of mercy and words of wisdom, Jews and Gentiles joined in slaying Him.

That death, however, of Christ the Lord is the life of the world. He laid down His life that the burden of our sins might be taken away,—that the curse of a broken law might be removed,—that satisfaction might be made to divine justice. 'He suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God.' And in proof that His sacrifice was accepted and sufficient, that the redemption wrought out for man was complete, '*God raised him up the third day.*' He came forth from the grave a King and Conqueror,—death vanquished,—sin atoned for,—Satan's head crushed,—the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers.

Peter and his companions were witnesses to the truth of their Lord's resurrection. They *'did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead.'* And they received from Him a solemn charge and commission to preach in His name the forgiveness of sins, and to testify of His future coming to judge the world. The prophets of old time had with one voice given their testimony, that through His name remission of sins should be obtained. Isaiah tells us that 'he was wounded for our transgressions;' Jeremiah speaks of a new covenant under which God promises to 'remember His people's iniquity no more;' Daniel testifies of the coming of the Messiah to 'finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity;' Micah exclaims, 'Who is a God like unto thee that pardoneth iniquity? He retaineth not his anger for ever because he delighteth in mercy;' Zechariah speaks of a fountain opened in the blood of Christ for 'sin and uncleanness;' Malachi tells of the Sun of righteousness arising 'with healing in his wings.'

And what ancient prophets witnessed, apostles of our Lord's days, and an innumerable company of preachers of our days, repeat again and again. *'Remission of sins,'*—they are sweet words to helpless, heavy-laden sinners. Is there one of us that can enter heaven with sin unforgiven? Not one. Is there one who cannot now obtain the blessing? Not one. If sin is a burden to us and not a delight,

—a trouble and not a pleasure,—if deep down in our hearts lies a longing for a place where sin can never enter, then may we be sure that Christ has borne our sins, and gained us forgiveness of them. We may rest on Jesus as a sin-forgiving Saviour, and wait with humble confidence for His appearing, when He shall come again in His glorious majesty to judge the quick and dead.

ACTS, xi. 1-18.

1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him,

3 Saying, thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descended, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes I considered, and saw four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.

9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.

11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me.

12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting.

Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house :

13 And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter ;

14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.

16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God ?

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

BEFORE we go on to consider the verses just read, let us look back for a moment or two to the result of Peter's address to Cornelius and his friends. The frame of mind in which that address was received would prepare us to expect a rich blessing to follow it. And when God has great things to give He draws forth men's hearts to desire and expect them. '*While Peter spake, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*' And because it was a hard matter to convince even believing Jews that God had a purpose of mercy towards the Gentiles, it was not only in His mighty but *secret* power that the Holy Ghost wrought upon the hearts of Peter's hearers. There were also *outward* signs and tokens

of His work. They '*spake with tongues, and magnified God.*'

Then Peter, recognizing God's gracious gift of the Spirit, declared that he could see no hindrance to the admission of these converts by baptism into the Church of Christ. Let us carefully notice that the apostle did not say, as some say in these days, 'They have received the baptism of the Spirit, therefore they do not need the baptism of water.' The grace of the Spirit had been received, but the sign and seal of its reception must be added. '*He commanded them to be baptized.*' He did not baptize them himself. Christ preached, but He administered baptism by His apostles. And after their Lord's ascension the apostles preached, but for the most part administered baptism by the hands of inferior ministers. We see one reason for this in what St. Paul says in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. He there says that 'Christ sent him not to baptize, but to preach the gospel,' and that he thanks God he had baptized but very few amongst them, 'Lest,' he adds, 'any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.' There were those who were ready to say, 'I am of Paul, and I of Cephas.' And this disposition to split into sects and parties might be increased, if the apostles themselves administered baptism to any great extent. Moreover, it might be thought, if they who had received special gifts of the Holy Ghost baptized much, that when they were

dead baptism would not be the same thing as when administered by them; not equally important or valuable. For these reasons amongst others the apostles did not themselves usually administer baptism. We must not think, however, that their not doing so shows baptism to be of small importance. On the contrary, all that we read in the early history of Christ's Church goes to prove its necessity, value, and importance.

And now we go on to the eleventh chapter. We see there that the news of the Gentiles having received the word of God awakened in the minds of the apostles and brethren in Judæa feelings of astonishment and, to some degree, of anger. When Peter came amongst them they took him to task for having, as they thought, broken the law of Moses, in eating familiarly with the uncircumcised. Then *Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them.* He told all the story of the vision seen by him,—of the appearance of the angel to Cornelius,—and of the result of his visit to Cæsarea. We have had these things before us, and have considered them already. And it is well worth while for us to notice how often we find in the Bible important matters repeated,—the same things said in almost the same words again and again. Thus we have two distinct deliveries of the Lord's Prayer; we have the chief part of the Sermon on the Mount repeated twice by our blessed Lord;

we have three full accounts of St. Paul's conversion. Similarly in the Old Testament we find passages in the history of Israel repeated by Moses, and in the books of Kings and Chronicles. We have large portions of the Psalms occurring twice or oftener. These are not 'vain repetitions.' 'The Lord who knoweth the hearts' knows how dull and forgetful we are, and how we need 'line upon line, and precept upon precept.' One sentence, too, or even one word, supplies in one passage what is wanting in another. And when we see this plan of repetition thus employed by the Holy Spirit in His own inspired word, we ought to be very slow to find fault with the same thing in our Prayer-book services. It is better to repeat than to omit or forget. And too often, alas! our thoughts may wander during a prayer; we may be thankful then to have an opportunity of calling them home when it is repeated.

Peter's plain and simple story entirely satisfied the minds of the brethren. In amazement and thankfulness they '*glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*' It was not only that God had offered to Gentiles as well as Jews life on their repenting. This was true, but more than this is included in the words. As Jesus Christ is 'exalted to give repentance as well as remission of sins,' so it was plain to Peter and his brethren that the Gospel promise was fulfilled in these Gentiles that God would 'take away the heart

of stone and give a heart of flesh ;' grace to repent as well as life upon repentance, had been given. We, too, are Gentiles, and to us, too, 'repentance unto life' is offered. Have we accepted it? Where are the marks of our having done so? True repentance is not mere sorrow for sin, but change of heart and life. Let us not be content with looking admiringly at blessings offered to us, but with the hand of faith grasp them, and in newness of life show that we have done so.

ACTS, xi. 19-24.

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem : and they sent forth Barnabas that he should go as far as Antioch.

23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith : and much people was added unto the Lord.

ABOUT the same time as the conversion of Cornelius took place, another great and good work was going on beyond the region of Palestine. In the eighth chapter of this book we read that 'there was' after Stephen's death 'a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem ; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa

and Samaria.' And now we read of the good results which followed this scattering. Far and wide journeyed the messengers of peace, like seed widely scattered by some rough wind. Through Phenicia,—through Cyprus,—and even as far as Antioch, they carried the good news of salvation through Christ. Some of them being men of Cyprus and Cyrene '*preached the Lord Jesus*' to their own fellow-countrymen, Gentiles, as Cornelius was. '*And the hand of the Lord was with them.*' He set His seal to their work; '*and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*' Tidings of this good work soon reached the Church in Jerusalem, and they sent forth Barnabas to observe and report upon it.

The first mention which we have of Barnabas is in the fourth chapter of the Acts. It is there said (Acts, iv. 36, 37) that 'Joses who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation), having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.' He seems to have been foremost in the display of Christian liberality. He was not a poor man, but was glad to throw his possessions into the common fund for the benefit of poorer members of the Church in days of trouble and rebuke. He was evidently a man of kind and loving heart; a man who loved to *see* others happy, and as far as he could to *make* them so; a man filled with that heavenly wisdom which is 'first pure, then peaceable, gentle,

easy to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.' (Jam. iii. 17.) In the verses which we have read Barnabas is spoken of as '*a good man.*' That word '*good*' is a word very familiar and very dear to us. It is a thoroughly English word. When we say of any one 'he is a truly *good* man,' we seem to mean 'he is a man friendly, just, upright, true, faithful in the performance of his duties to God and man.' All this seems to be more or less comprehended in the expression '*a good man.*' Only there is a mistake made by some as to the use of this word '*good.*' Men of worldly heart and worldly life,—men who would not themselves like to be thought or called true Christians,—are often called '*good men.*'

Now we must remember that no one is perfectly good but One, *i.e.* God; and there is nothing really good which does not come *from* God or lead *to* God. It is not of course that everything which is not strictly religious is bad. Life's daily comforts and enjoyments are from God, and He would have us to be industrious, happy, and cheerful. He means us to draw pleasure day by day from the works of His hands and the gifts of His Providence. But still a life without God cannot be a really *good* life; a heart which shuts itself up against God cannot be a *good* heart; a man who thinks he can get on in the world very well without God cannot be in the true sense of

the word a '*good*' man. And if we come to look closely into the life of one of those irreligious '*good men*' whom the world boasts of, we find some sad flaws; we find selfishness, pride, anger, lust, ready to break forth when wishes are crossed or temptation presented. In short, a man cannot be a truly *good* man without a changed heart; and a changed heart is a heart wrought upon by God the Holy Spirit,—a heart which has had its wrong things, at least in great measure, corrected,—a heart in which a new principle of resistance to sin has been implanted, and love to God and godliness is growing and increasing. Cannot '*a good man*' get to heaven? Certainly. But the question is who is '*a good man*.' We must not try and persuade ourselves that any one can be good without God,—without prayer to God,—without faith in God,—without love to God. God is *the Good One*. The word '*God*' means this. Let us bring our hearts, then, to Him, and pray Him to cleanse and sanctify them by His Holy Spirit, that from a good tree good fruits may grow.

Barnabas is said further to have been '*full of faith*.' Here is the secret of the man's goodness. He looked upwards and onwards, and so, '*enduring as seeing him that is invisible*,' he thought of what would please not men but God,—of what a sinner ransomed by the blood of Christ ought to *do* and to

be,—of what will be seen to be most worthy of thought when the light of a great eternity has scattered for ever the shadows of time.

Let us pray, 'Lord, increase our faith; let it become stronger, deeper, more fruitful.' It will be so if, like good Barnabas, we are in any measure '*full of the Holy Ghost.*' We have had this same expression used with reference to Stephen. Of course there is, and always must be, much of mystery about what God *is* and *does*; so we cannot fully understand how God the Holy Spirit occupies man's heart,—how any one can be said to be 'full of the Holy Ghost,' but it is all true, nevertheless. In Barnabas and in Stephen, and in tens of thousands more, God the Holy Spirit has dwelt and dwells, cheering, enlightening, strengthening, comforting, according to the need of each. '*Full of the Holy Ghost!*' What a happy, holy, and useful man must he be of whom this can be truly said! But let us not stop there. Let us look at our Lord's gracious promises as to the work of the Spirit in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of St. John. Let us be quite sure that those promises are meant for us as much as for the apostles, and let us act upon the Saviour's own words, 'Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.'

When Barnabas was come to Antioch, and saw the good work going on, he was glad. He found good done and doing in which he had had no part,

yet he was not jealous of success granted to others ; he rejoiced unfeignedly in the extension of Christ's kingdom, whatever instruments might be employed to promote it. And he '*exhorted them all that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.*' This 'cleaving to the Lord' is a very great thing. Christ said once to some Jews who believed in Him, 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed.' Sometimes, under a pressure of first conviction of sin, there seems a fair start towards heaven, and then comes afterwards a fading away of serious impressions, and an uncertain walk as if we hardly knew what we had in view and whither we were going. We may well, then, be solemnly reminded to 'cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart ;' to cleave to Christ as our hope and refuge, our Master and only Saviour. '*With purpose of heart ;*' with real, honest, hearty desire to reach heaven ; with the singleness of eye and true sincerity of those who remember that a fair start is not enough, putting on the harness is not enough, still less the *intention* to start and to fight some day ; but that 'he that shall endure to the end the same shall be saved.'

ACTS, xi. 25, 26.

25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul :

26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

WE may remember that when Paul after his conversion was looked upon with some distrust by the brethren at Jerusalem, Barnabas kindly took him by the hand, and told them what the Lord had done for him and how he had begun to preach the faith which once he destroyed. A plot against St. Paul's life compelled him to retreat to Tarsus, his native home. There, now that the help of another fellow-labourer was required at Antioch, Barnabas set out to seek him ; and for a whole year these two good men laboured together so successfully that many were added to the Lord. The grain of mustard-seed was now becoming a great tree, and it became necessary to give a distinct and distinguishing name to the new body which had sprung up, and which stood out from amongst heathen Gentiles and

unbelieving Jews, marked as separate by new hopes, new laws, and a new life. Up to this time they had been known by different names. Their *enemies* had spoken of them in scornful terms, as 'followers of one Jesus of Nazareth,' 'the sect of the Nazarenes,' men of 'that way,' 'Galilæans,' and such like; and their *friends* had been content simply to speak of them as 'the Church,' 'the brethren,' 'the disciples.'

But from this time forward they were to be known by a different name,—a name which should at once declare to every one who heard it who was their Leader, their Head, their Master. '*The disciples were called CHRISTIANS first at Antioch.*'

The word 'Christian' has come into very common use amongst us. We speak of 'Christendom' as distinguished from countries where Jesus Christ is not known and worshipped. We speak of 'Christian' laws; 'Christian' institutions; 'Christian' liberty. Those whom we meet and do business with from day to day are, with very few exceptions, 'such as profess and call themselves Christians.' And there is something very remarkable in this widespread use of the name 'Christian.' For the Church of Christ had a very small beginning. There was a time when an upper room in Jerusalem sufficed to contain all that then represented the Church. In the verses before us we seem to be looking at the first bubbling up of a fountain which has gone on flowing, and enlarging as it flowed, into a great

river which runs in its strength and glory through all lands. How is it that the word 'Christian' is so familiar to us and held in such honour by us? It was a new word eighteen hundred years back, as that which it represented was a new thing. The conclusion is plain. The work is of God; the Church is of His building.

But, after all, what is a Christian in the true sense of the word? St. Paul says, 'He is not a Jew* which is one outwardly;' 'they are not all Israel who are of Israel.' And so we may say in these days, 'He is not a Christian which is one *outwardly*, whose Christianity is only that which has come to him by birth and education, or he scarcely knows how; whose religion goes no further than occasional joining in acts of worship.' A Christian is something more than this, and he is one indeed which is one *inwardly*, united to Christ by a faith which is 'of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.'

The first, most natural, and simple meaning of the word 'Christian' would seem to be, 'belonging to Christ,'—'Christ's men and women,'—'Christ's soldiers,'—His property, His purchase. In all ages it has been common for the servants and followers of any great leader and teacher, to be distinguished by the name of him whom they obey and follow. Why should it not be so with the followers of Christ?

* Rom. ii. 28, and ix. 6.

Especially when we remember, that the connexion between Christ and His people is not only a connexion between a leader and his followers,—a teacher and his disciples. It is something deeper and closer than this ; and is represented by the union of the head of the body and its members, the vine and its branches, the foundation-stone of a building and the superstructure.

How do we become Christians ? As far as outward profession goes we become so in baptism. We are then 'Christened.' And there are cases in which it does indeed appear that from earliest infancy there is a sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, and a corresponding life. But we cannot look around us without seeing very plainly that there are very many who are Christians in nothing more than name. There are hundreds of baptized men and women who have nothing at all in their lives and characters the least like Christ. And what a strange contradiction it is for a man to be called a Christian and yet to be utterly unlike Christ,—to have no love for Christ,—no regard for Christ's honour,—no desire for the extension of His kingdom. Those who are Christians in the *truest, best sense of the word* become so by the quickening, renewing work of God the Holy Spirit ; it may be in baptism,—it may be afterwards ; but whenever it takes place it is a real work,—a real change. It is the coming of Christ and the sinner together ; it is

a man beginning to look at Christ in a new way,—beginning really to love Him and to lean for salvation upon Him. St. Paul says, ‘If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.’ (Rom. viii. 9.) He may, like his neighbours, be called a Christian, but if the Holy Spirit does not work in his heart, moulding him into some kind of likeness to Christ, he has nothing of Christ within him, nothing of Christ but the name. We ought, then, carefully to examine ourselves in this matter. We must not rest content in merely bearing the name of Christian, lest perhaps we should be disowned by Christ at the last. Let us think of what He did and suffered for us, and how well He deserves our best love, our best services. Let us pray that we may be drawn by the Holy Spirit to Jesus. With sorrow and shame for past unbelief and indifference, let us determine henceforward to be Christians indeed.

There have been days when it was thought the highest honour to bear the name of ‘*Christian.*’ We read of one holy martyr who, being chained to the stake and the fire being kindled to consume him, answered every mocking question of his tormentors by exclaiming, ‘I am a Christian—I am a Christian.’ St. Peter says, ‘If any many suffer as a *Christian* let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.*’ Let us not dishonour the holy name by which we are called. Let us think of a

* 1 Pet. iv. 16.

Christian's hopes, a Christian's privileges, a Christian's future home, and consider what we ought to be who have so much in possession and so much in prospect. Christ will draw Christians to Himself to be with Him for ever. May we be more *like* Him now, that we may be *with* Him hereafter in His glorious kingdom !

ACTS, xi. 27-30 ; xii. 1-6.

27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world : which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.

29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judæa :

30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Chap. xii. 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

2 And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.

3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)

4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him ; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

5 Peter therefore was kept in prison : but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains : and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

JUST about the time that the honoured, hallowed name of 'Christian' was first given to the disciples at Antioch, there came some from Jerusalem to whom the spirit of prophecy was given. We have seen how the promise given by the prophet Joel, that God would pour out in Gospel days His Spirit upon the Church, in such a way that some of its members should prophesy, was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. We have a further fulfilment of the promise here. Amongst the number who prophesied was one Agabus, of whom we read further on in the twenty-first chapter, as prophesying of the bonds and imprisonment which awaited the Apostle Paul in Jerusalem. This Agabus foretold the coming of a time of famine; and the disciples, with truly Christian forethought and wise liberality, began at once to make provision for the coming trouble, and raised a subscription for the relief of the poorer brethren in Judæa. In acting thus they set us a beautiful example of a timely charity which does not wait for an appeal to stir it up, a thoughtful consideration which *anticipates* need, and is blest, not only in what it gives, but in the readiness with which the gift is bestowed.

And now in chapter twelve we read of trouble and persecution again. '*Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.*' This Herod was grandson to the man who killed the little children in the coasts of Bethlehem, and nephew of

him who beheaded John the Baptist and afterwards derided our blessed Lord. The Herods were a wicked and cruel family, distinguished only by their hatred and persecution of Christ and His Church. The Herod mentioned in the chapter before us, to win the good opinions of the Jews over whom he ruled, began to persecute the Church. First he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. This James was one of those two sons of Zebedee, for whom their mother had asked that one might sit on the right and the other on the left of Christ in His kingdom. To him, first of the two brothers, was the Lord's prophecy fulfilled, given in answer to his mother's request, 'Ye shall drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with.' His mother's prayer was granted, though not in the sense in which she meant it. James went by the headsman's sword to join his dear Master in His heavenly kingdom.

Herod's wicked act pleased the Jews so much, that he thought he could not do better than follow it up by another of the same kind. It was just then the time of the Feast of the Passover. It was a crowded time in Jerusalem. Strangers from all parts flocked to keep the feast. Herod then, laid hands on Peter, and shut him up in prison, intending when the feast was just over, and before the crowds had dispersed, to bring him out for execution. So '*Peter was kept in prison.*' It seemed, however, as if Herod

had some misgivings about what he was doing ; for he employed sixteen soldiers to watch this one Galilæan fisherman. These were divided into four companies, who kept watch in turn day and night ; and to two of them the apostle was chained, an arm being fettered to each soldier.

Meanwhile, *'prayer was made without ceasing,'* — *'instant and earnest prayer,'* as the margin has it, — *'of the church unto God for him.'* The Church here spoken of was a mere handful of Christians, most of them of humble condition. They were just now clustered together as sheep in a storm, meeting in one another's houses for prayer ; and lifting up night and day their earnest supplications that their dear friend and teacher might be plucked out of the grasp of his cruel persecutors, and given back to them again. It was their duty to pray thus ; it was a comfort and a relief to them to do so. But after all it seemed sadly hopeless work. The very last night of Peter's imprisonment had come. The very next day he was to be brought out for execution. There was nothing whatever hopeful about his case but this, that a few people were praying for him. But then the fervent and faithful prayers of this little body of Christians were calling in the help of Omnipotence on his behalf. *'Prayer,'* it has been well said, *'moves the arm that moves the universe.'* Here is a man shut up in a prison,—guards before him, behind him, beside him,—chains fastening him

to his keepers,—the sword and the executioner ready;—a few hours only left before the sentence of a cruel persecutor should be carried into effect. On the other hand, there is a company of humble men and women met together in the house of one of their number for prayer. What have these two vastly different scenes to do with one another? What possible connexion is there between them? Only just this; those prayers are unlocking the prison-doors and striking off the fetters, for, in answer to them, He is coming with His help who has all power in heaven and earth, and loves to be known as a God that heareth prayer.

It was the very night before Peter was to be executed that God sent him deliverance. ‘Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.’ It was just when Abraham’s hand was lifted up to slay his son, that the voice of the angel stayed the stroke. It was the very last day of the four hundred and thirty years during which Israel was to sojourn in Egypt that God delivered them; ‘the *self-same day* it came to pass that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.’ God has wise and gracious purposes in such delays. He ‘waits that He may be’ doubly gracious. He teaches thus lessons of humility, confidence, and perseverance in prayer.

When God sent succour to Peter, he ‘*was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains.*’ Death was, as it were, staring him in the face, and yet he

was calm and fearless. With a good conscience,—a heart filled with peace, and hope, and joy,—Peter was far happier in his prison than Herod in his palace. *Once* Peter was cowardly enough, and trembled at the question of a maidservant. Now, in prison, chained and guarded, he slept so soundly, that it needed a blow from the angel to awake him. So God ‘giveth his beloved sleep.’ The best pillow is a good conscience and simple trust in God. It is not on *where* we are but on *what* we are that our comfort and happiness depend.

‘Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.’

Peter knew that if to-morrow was to be his dying day it would only bring him into the presence of his once-denied but forgiving and ever-loving Master. The Holy Ghost, the Comforter, was with him, and he was brave, and strong, and calm. O may we have more of Peter’s faith, and love, and courage! May we have the Holy Spirit’s comfort and guidance, then we shall be able to bear trials without fainting, and to face death without fear!

ACTS, xii. 7-17.

7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison : and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9 And he went out, and followed him ; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision.

10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city ; which opened to them of his own accord : and they went out, and passed on through one street ; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark where many were gathered together praying.

13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda.

14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.

17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

PETER was quietly asleep in the prison, when the angel that was to bring him out appeared. We should scarcely have thought that the uncomfortableness of his position, bound as he was by chains to two soldiers, would have allowed of his sleeping; but still more should we have expected the state of his feelings to have kept him awake. But as we have seen faith in God kept him in peace. It seems plain from the story that the light which shone around the angel—the opening of the prison-doors—the passing out of the prisoner,—all this was not seen or noticed by the guards. Even Peter at first could not believe that it was all real, but thought he saw a vision. Plainly the eyes of the sentinels were sealed; for in the morning *'there was no small stir among them, what was become of Peter?'* One of those glorious beings who *'excel in strength, and do God's commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word,'* came down—the living answer to fervent prayer; he roused the prisoner—struck off his fetters—bade him gird himself, and bind on his sandals. All was to be done in an orderly manner,

with no sign of haste or fear; and then, when all was ready, Peter was bidden to follow the angel out of the prison. So they two passed forth. The first guard, and then the second, were safely passed without hindrance; and then they came to a great iron gate, closing in the prison precincts, and leading into the city. This gate, without key or force, swung open to them of its own accord, and the apostle and his guide went through, and passing through one street the angel departed. Peter now could find his own way, and here, as elsewhere, we see that miraculous means are never used when ordinary means are at hand. Angels, as we know, have been often employed in helping God's servants and defeating their enemies. An angel smote the wicked men of Sodom, who sought to injure Lot, with blindness. An angel slew the first-born in Egypt. An angel smote one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the host of Sennacherib as he besieged Jerusalem. An angel shut the mouths of the lions which would have devoured praying Daniel. An angel had once before brought Peter out of prison. An angel was sent to Paul, when tossing in a dark night on a stormy sea, to cheer and comfort him.

We must not think that because we do not see angels, therefore they are not about amongst us. Now as ever they are 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.'* Perhaps we

* Heb. i. 14.

have heard dear friends, on their dying beds, speak of seeing angels beside them. We are not to think this the mere wandering of delirium. Why should not their eyes be opened to see what was unseen by others, as was the case with Elisha's servant at Dothan? When we watch some one die, we do not *see* the soul as it departs; but we soon know, by many a sad token, that it is gone. So we do not see angels, but we are sure that still as ever 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him.' We may see how the simple-minded Christians of early days took comfort from the doctrine of angels being appointed as guardians of God's people; for when the disciples, who were praying together in Mark's house, could not believe that he was free, they said, 'It is his angel;' it cannot be the apostle himself, it is one of those guardian spirits who, as the angels of Christ's little ones, do always, as He said Himself, behold the face of God the Father. They believed their Master's words. They reckoned it no vain superstition to think that angels, unseen but really present, serve and succour His people. Let us be sure of the same. If the Lord of angels is ours, we shall not lack angels as mighty and loving friends. They rejoice in the sinner's repentance; they have charge over the Christian, to keep him in all his ways, and bear at death his spirit home.

At first Peter could not believe that all that

happened to him was true ; the truth however soon broke upon him. It was simply God answering prayer by delivering His servant. '*Now,*' said he, '*I know of a surety that God has sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.*' And then, anxious to relieve the anxieties of his friends, he went straight to the house where those who were praying for him were assembled. They were asking for that which was actually given. So was fulfilled the promise, 'It shall come to pass before they call I will answer, and whilst they are yet speaking I will hear.' Peter then came to the door and knocked. On this a damsel named Rhoda came to ask who was there. Those were evil days, and the knock might be that of a spy, an enemy, a persecutor. So it seemed safer not to open the door at once, but to question and to listen, and try to find out from the voice if the visitor were a friend. Peter soon made himself known, and then, just like a warm-hearted, affectionate, thoughtless girl, Rhoda '*opened not the gate for gladness ;*' but dashed into the house, leaving the apostle waiting and knocking still, and, in breathless excitement '*told how Peter stood before the gate.*' How was her story received ? We must remember that they had been praying for this very thing. If prayer for Peter's deliverance was to be successful, it could only be in the short space of that one night. To-morrow it would be

too late. And now the answer comes ; the request is granted. Yet those who have been praying are ready to believe anything rather than that it is so ; they will believe that Rhoda is '*mad*,' or that Peter's guardian angel is there ; almost anything, in short, sooner than that God, in answer to their prayer, has really given them back Peter himself.

Whilst they were questioning and doubting, Peter went on knocking. At last the door was opened, and there stood—prayer's answer. Astonishment seized the company. And yet why should it be so ? Was it so very strange that God should do what they had begged Him to do ? Eager tongues began to ask, Was it really he ? how was it ? when was it ? Question was heaped upon question, until Peter, waving his hand to quiet the confusion, calmly told '*how the Lord had brought him out of the prison.*'

The whole scene, so simply and naturally told, reminds us of our slowness to take God at His word, and to expect what He has promised to give. We ask, and yet are so weak in faith that we are surprised if we receive what we asked for. May God help us to pray more fervently, and to believe more firmly that if we ask anything according to His will He will give it us.

ACTS, xii. 18-25.

18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judæa to Cæsarea, and there abode.

20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them.

22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

WE read last, the story of Peter's deliverance from prison by an angel, on the very night before his intended execution. When the day broke great were the confusion and consternation amongst the

guard of soldiers to find their prisoner gone. Wicked Herod, deaf to all their excuses and explanations, in disappointed rage ordered them to be put to death. His own end, however, was fast approaching; his course of crime and cruelty was nearly run. He went down from Jerusalem to Cæsarea, to attend a yearly festival held there in honour of the Roman emperor. Whilst there the people of Tyre and Sidon sent a deputation to him. Some quarrel had arisen between Herod and the inhabitants of those towns, and they could not afford to be at enmity with him, as they depended upon his country for their supplies of corn and other food. Tyre and Sidon, though famous for their wealth and merchandise, yet lying on the sea-coast had to obtain food from inland parts. Solomon gave Hiram King of Tyre twenty thousand measures of wheat, and twenty measures of pure oil yearly, in exchange for cedar-trees, fir-trees, and gold; and long after his time the people of Judah and Israel are spoken of as trading with their wheat in Tyre.

It being of importance, then, to the people of Tyre and Sidon to have peace with Herod, they contrived to secure the goodwill of Blastus, the king's chamberlain, and through him they sought a reconciliation. Herod, puffed up with pride, appointed a day on which to give audience to them. Josephus tells us that, to impress the minds of the ambassadors more with his greatness, the vain man

clothed himself in a robe of silver thread, which glistened brightly in the sunshine. Then from his throne he *'made an oration unto them.'* His hearers, hoping by gross flattery to win his favour, cried out, *'It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.'* Herod, well pleased, accepted the profane flattery instead of rebuking it, and immediately, in the very height of his triumph, the bolt of vengeance fell; *'the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory.'* An agonising and loathsome disease seized upon him; whilst yet alive he became the prey of worms which usually wait for death to furnish their food; and thus, in shame and anguish, he whom others had flattered, and who thought so well of himself, *'gave up the ghost.'*

Herod is not the only one of whom the Bible tells us, as having bitterly learnt the lesson, that *'those that walk in pride God is able to abase.'* Pharaoh at the Red Sea;—Sennacherib leaving his vast host dead corpses around the walls of besieged Jerusalem;—Nebuchadnezzar boasting of his city and palace, and while the words were in his mouth, deprived of his reason, and driven out a forlorn and despised maniac amongst the beasts of the field;—Belshazzar slain on the very night of his impious revelry: these and many more struck down in the height of their pride and presumption, all show how *'God resisteth the proud,'* and *'casteth down the mighty from their seat.'*

‘Perhaps, when we read the histories of such as these, we are disposed to say within ourselves, ‘What are these to us? We cannot sin as they did; we are not proud as they were. They were great men, we have not their position or power.’ But we must remember why the angel of the Lord smote Herod; it was *‘because he gave not God the glory.’* The cowardly flatterers who listened to his oration paid him honour due to God only, and he received it well pleased. Now we are made for God’s glory; we have nothing that we have not received; and we are bound to ‘glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are his.’ For this we were born—for this we are preserved—for this we have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. And we give God glory by taking Him at His own word, and trusting wholly in His Son, whom He has sent into the world to save us for the salvation of our souls. We give God glory by praising Him, as He says, ‘Whoso offereth me praise he honoureth me.’ We give Him glory by a life of faith and obedience, by works of love and usefulness. ‘Herein,’ said Christ, ‘is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.’

But is it not the case that too many never think for a moment of glorifying God? They live as if they belonged only to themselves. ‘Our lips are our own,’ they say; our lives are our own; ‘who is Lord over us?’ And it might be said quite as truly

of many a man in a humble condition of life, as of rich and proud King Belshazzar, 'the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.'* It is very easy for one sinner to flatter his fellow-sinner. 'Men,' says the Psalmist, 'will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.' (Ps. xlix. 18.)

Now, if a man lives a selfish, careless, and ungodly life, we do not expect some terrible judgment to fall upon him like that which cut down wicked Herod. It is not often that God's judgments break out upon men in this world. The ungodly are 'reserved to the day of judgment to be punished.' But we must not think that the thoroughly worldly, ungodly man escapes punishment *even here and now*. It is punishment terrible enough that God leaves him alone,—that conscience speaks less powerfully, —that by degrees the Spirit of God ceases to strive with him,—the Bible becomes distasteful,—Sunday services a mere form,—and the thought of eternity utterly hateful. Meanwhile, there is even something like a parallel between his end and that of Herod. Herod, smitten by the angel, was 'eaten of worms, and so gave up the ghost.' The careless, irreligious man, who has reached the state just described, is as it were 'eaten of worms.' Earthly cares, evil tempers, secret lusts, gain more and more hold upon him, and, like creatures born of corruption and

* Daniel, v. 23.

decay, eat into the very life of the soul. 'She that liveth in pleasure,' says St. Paul, 'is dead whilst she liveth.*' The man who, living only for himself and sin, never cares to give God glory, may speak, and look, and act, like a living man, but in God's sight he is dead.

Could there possibly be a greater contrast than that which this chapter presents between the lives and histories of the two men chiefly spoken of? Here is Peter in a prison—Herod on his throne; Peter delivered by an angel—Herod smitten by one, perhaps by the very same; Peter rescued in the very crisis of danger by a marvellous interposition of Providence—Herod cut down in the very height of his pride. But if there was a contrast in their lives, what shall we say or think of their ends? It can be no breach of charity to speak of the murderer of one apostle, and the persecutor and would-be murderer of another, cut down in the height of his sin and pride, as hopelessly lost. And we can have no shadow of doubt as to Peter's having had 'an entrance ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of his God and Saviour.' He has been with Jesus more than eighteen hundred years, and shall be with Him for ever. May we follow him as he followed Christ, and be with him and his Lord in glory!

* 1 Tim. v. 6.

ACTS, xiii. 1-3.

1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers ; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

A PROPHET, in Scripture language, does not *always* mean one who foretells future events. The word is often used to mean simply 'a preacher.' Now amongst those who were thus prophets, or preachers, in the Church at Antioch, there was one whose name we should very little expect to see mentioned, that is, '*Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch,*' 'Herod's foster-brother,' as the margin has it. Who would have expected to find a Christian teacher and preacher in a man brought up in close companionship with such a monster of cruelty and wickedness as Herod—in one of necessity accustomed to the profligacy of a corrupt court, and continually in the way of hearing

evil things said of Christians? How and when God's grace reached Manaen, and who was the instrument of his conversion, we do not know. All we know is that he had been brought up side by side with a very wicked king, and that out of the midst of great darkness he came forth to be a bright light, and a blessed witness for God's truth. Does not this teach us, that if a man, from *circumstances* and not from *choice*, finds himself placed amongst the enemies of God, it does not in any way necessarily follow that he must be irreligious and faithless? There was a holy Joseph in the house of Potiphar; a good Obadiah in the court of wicked King Ahab; a praying Daniel in Babylon. There were 'saints' in 'Cæsar's household;' though the Cæsar spoken of was one of the most cruel and wicked of all the Roman emperors. Of course, whenever it is possible, we are to separate ourselves from ungodly companions. But this is not always possible; and if it be not, we must not think that God's grace cannot reach us, and His power sustain us amidst the overflowings of ungodliness around. It *does* not make any one religious to live in a religious family; it *need* not make a man the opposite to live in an ungodly one.

'As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' These words teach us most plainly that the Holy Ghost is a dis-

tinct person in the sacred Trinity,—God equally with the Father and the Son. He is not a mere influence from God (as some vainly and wickedly say), but Himself truly, essentially, and eternally God. ‘*The Holy Ghost said,*’—He as God issued the command,—‘set apart for my work and service Barnabas and Saul; I have marked out a special work for them—I have selected them as my special messengers—and now it is for you to appoint them formally to their solemn office.’ None but a distinct person could speak thus.

We are accustomed to pray to the Father, that for Jesus Christ’s sake He would give us His Holy Spirit to guide and sanctify us. And this is right; this is according to the teaching of the Bible, and the practice of Christians in all ages. But beyond this it is good for us sometimes to pray directly to God the Holy Spirit Himself—to confess directly to Him the sins which we have committed against His Divine Majesty—to acknowledge how often and how sadly we have turned a deaf ear to His gentle whispers—how often we have left the book which He inspired unread—how little we sought His gracious help in following after sanctification of heart and life. And when we have thus penitently confessed our sins to Him—the Lord and giver of life—let us go on to pray that He will not leave or forsake us—that He will never withdraw from us His holy light and guidance; but still deal in mercy

with our souls — enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting, and sealing us unto the day of redemption.

It was the call of the Holy Ghost on this occasion which made Barnabas an apostle. He was not one of the twelve. He was not like Matthias, chosen to supply a vacancy. Yet he was an apostle, — made so by the special call of the Spirit. He is spoken of as an apostle in the next chapter. He and Saul were to be ‘separated for *the work*’ to which the Holy Ghost called them. The occupation of the ministers of Christ is again and again spoken of as a *work*. Christ is said, on His ascension, to give apostles and evangelists ‘for *the work* of the ministry.’ Mark was condemned for not going with the apostles to ‘*the work*.’ The last charge of the aged Apostle Paul, to his dear son Timothy, was that he should ‘do *the work* of an evangelist.’ The business, then, of a minister is a real *work*. He is not sent merely to go decently through certain religious ceremonies, of which he takes one part, and his people the other. He is sent to seek for Christ’s sheep that are scattered abroad, — to comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak, — to warn and teach, if by any means he may save some, — to endeavour to build up believers in their holy faith. Of course it is only God who can supply the sufficiency for these things. But surely we might look for happier results from all our preaching and hearing, if ministers and

people were to regard the business in which both are engaged as a real and deeply important work, — something to be done—something to be gained : not mere talk, mere forms, mere professions ; but souls to be saved, and God to be glorified.

When the Holy Spirit had pointed out whom He wished to employ, He would have the Church solemnly set them apart, and consecrate them for His service. And the bidding of the Spirit was carefully obeyed. ‘*When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*’ Of course, if it so pleased the Holy Ghost, he might have moved the minds of Barnabas and Saul to go forth of themselves, to minister where the Spirit sent them. But this was not his way of working. It is not ‘I have separated,’ but ‘*Separate ye.*’ I mark out my chosen messengers, now do ye publicly give them their commission. The express call of the Holy Ghost does not make the outward form of ordination needless. In our ordination service it is asked, ‘Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon you this office and ministration?’ And if the persons questioned can humbly, but honestly answer, ‘I trust so,’—still this is not enough ; along with the inward call must go the outward ordinance—the laying on of hands.

Only let us all remember that prayers and

praises, services and sermons, hearing and reading, will all be cold, formal, profitless, without the Holy Spirit's help. For that help let us evermore pray. With Christ's own promises before us, we may pray with confidence, and shall not pray in vain.

ACTS, xiii. 4-12.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul (who also is called Paul) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

PAUL and Barnabas having been called by the

Holy Ghost, and duly commissioned by their brethren, departed unto Seleucia, and from thence sailed to Cyprus, which was the native country of Barnabas. Landing at Salamis, '*they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews;*' their assistant in ministerial work being John, better known as Mark the writer of the second of the Gospels, who was nephew to Barnabas.

Having passed through the whole island, the three came to Paphos, which was at that time the seat of the Roman government. There the governor, Sergius Paulus, a man of prudence and candour, sent for Paul and Barnabas, and '*desired to hear the word of God.*' There was, however, an enemy at hand in the person of one Elymas,—a sorcerer, a man pretending to possess extraordinary gifts and powers, and no doubt like the magicians of Egypt assisted by the devil. This man having gained some influence over the governor, and using it doubtless for his own selfish ends, was naturally anxious not to be exposed and defeated by the new Christian teachers. He therefore '*withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.*' Then Paul, sharply rebuking him, declared that in punishment for his sin there should fall blindness upon him for a season. At once the judgment was inflicted, and the presumptuous opposer was, like a helpless child, obliged to seek some one '*to lead him by the hand.*'

It might perhaps seem to us, as we read St.

Luke's history, as though St. Paul showed too much of anger in speaking to and dealing with Elymas. '*Full of all subtilty and mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness*'—these are hard-sounding words. But we must remember that the apostle is said to be '*full of the Holy Ghost.*' He spoke as a prophet directly inspired by the Spirit. Similarly our blessed Lord said to the stubborn and unbelieving Jews, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.' He denounced fearful woes upon hypocritical scribes and Pharisees. He spoke of Herod as a 'fox;' and of those who attributed His mighty works to the aid of the devil as a 'generation of vipers.'

We see from all this that it is quite possible to be angry and not to sin; to rebuke sharply, and yet not to offend. But then we must remember that we have not our Lord's perfect discernment of spirits,—His pure abhorrence of iniquity combined with pity for the sinner, His supreme authority, His unerring justice. Neither, again, are we apostles; we have not St. Paul's commission or his power. We must not plead his example, except we be (as cannot happen) in his position. If we have to rebuke sin, we must keep careful watch over our spirits and our tongues, lest earthly passion be mixed up with what seems zeal for God's honour.

As to the judgment which fell upon Elymas, it seemed to correspond with his sin. Bodily blind-

ness was a fit punishment for wilful spiritual blindness. The man *would* not be enlightened,—he *would* walk on in darkness; so his eyes were darkened, his heart being already dark.

The judgment was suddenly inflicted. ‘*Immediately,*’ whilst St. Paul spoke, ‘*there fell on him a mist and a darkness.*’ Yet the punishment was, after all, comparatively mild and only temporary. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for their sin, this man only lost his sight; and this too only ‘*for a season.*’ And this, like other judgments inflicted in the early days of the Church, was meant to be useful to others—to awaken attention, and to startle enemies; so that many might hear, and fear, and turn to the Lord.

Accordingly we find that the sudden and fearful visitation had a great effect upon the mind of Sergius Paulus. He ‘*believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*’ He was astonished at the miracle wrought,—amazed to see how God thus set His seal to the testimony of His messenger. He had before been disposed to listen and to inquire. Now he savingly ‘*believed.*’ So was the wrath of man made to praise God. The opposition of Elymas, giving occasion for the performance of a great miracle, led to the conversion of the governor, and his admission into the Church of Christ.

The great practical lesson which the story before us seems to teach is, the great sin and danger of

trying to turn any from the right way—of hindering them from receiving the truth. No language could be stronger and more severe than that addressed by St. Paul to Elymas. And why? Simply because, as the apostle's earnest pleadings were winning their way into the heart of Sergius Paulus, that wretched sorcerer made difficulties—suggested doubts—and did all in his power to defeat Paul's preaching, and to turn away his hearer from the faith. In acting thus he was doing the devil's work, whose aim continually is to *do* evil and to *undo* good.

And let us not think that it is impossible for any of us to fall into sin like that of Elymas. We do so when in any way we hinder and discourage any from setting out or persevering in a right course. At all times there is much to overcome when a man begins in earnest to make for heaven. Old bad habits—sloth and self-indulgence—the temptations of the devil—the evil example of a careless world: these are sore hindrances to him. So, when his heart is stirred, and he begins to long after better things, and seems to catch a glimpse of Christ and His love, and thirst for pardon and peace, it is sadly easy to discourage him, and turn him back to his old course of indifference. A laugh—a sneer—something contemptuous said about his being 'a hypocrite,' or 'thinking himself better than others'—a little ridicule about reading the Bible or prayer

— worst of all perhaps, a scoff about his going to the Lord's table,—these have been the ruin of many. It is all very well for those who do such mischief to say, 'I meant no harm,—it was all in joke,—there are differences of opinion—we need not all think alike.' St. Paul would say to such thoughtless scoffers and jesters, 'Ye children of the devil, and enemies of all righteousness, will ye not cease to pervert the right way of the Lord?' They who do the devil's work must expect to share the devil's doom. Let us never forget that there are only two sides, and we *must* and we *do* take one or the other. Christ said, 'he that is not with Me is against Me.' It would be a miserable thing to be convicted at last of having turned any aside from the way that leads to heaven. On the other hand, how cheering is the promise, 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' (Dan. xii. 3.)

ACTS, xiii. 14-41.

14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath-day, and sat down.

15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

18 And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

19 And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

20 And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

21 And afterward they desired a king; and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

22 And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

23 Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus.

24 When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.

26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath-day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.

28 And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

30 But God raised him from the dead :

31 And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

34 And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

36 For David after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption :

37 But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins :

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets :

42 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish : for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

FROM Paphos, in the island of Cyprus, '*Paul and his company*' went to Perga in Pamphylia. There John left them for Jerusalem. His mother's house was there, and it is possible home attractions may have for a time drawn him away from the work of the ministry in which he was engaged. We shall hear more of this when we come to the fifteenth chapter.

From Perga Paul and his companions came by a journey inland, of about one hundred miles, to Antioch in Pisidia ; a very different place from that Antioch in Syria of which we read in the eleventh chapter, as the place where the disciples were first called Christians. On reaching this city, Paul and Barnabas '*went into the synagogue*' of the Jews '*on the Sabbath-day,*' according to their usual plan. After the reading of the appointed lessons from the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue invited the apostles to address the audience. Paul

accordingly rose and preached the beautiful and comprehensive sermon which we have read. It is a sermon very like, in its chief features, to those of Stephen and Peter which we have already considered.

The apostle goes back to the time when God chose Israel to be His own peculiar people ; he traces their history through Moses, Samuel, and Saul, down to David. He shows how the coming of Christ to be the Saviour of the world was the fulfilment of His promise to David, that in the kingdom of his Son all nations should be blessed. He then fearlessly declares, that it was through gross ignorance and misunderstanding of the prophets read every Sabbath amongst them, that the rulers and people of the Jews had slain their promised Messiah. He shows, just as Peter had done before him, how in all that wicked men did to Jesus of Nazareth there was an accomplishment of '*that which was written of Him.*'

And then taking, after the manner of Peter, four texts from the Psalms and the prophecy of Isaiah, he shows how the '*promises made to the fathers*' had been fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The blessed conclusion to be drawn from the whole is contained in these words, '*Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins : and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*'

We may notice, that there is not a single sermon recorded in this book, as having been preached by the first messengers of the Gospel, in which the resurrection of Christ is not brought forward as the great crowning event of the work of our redemption,—the seal set by God upon His acceptance of that work. St. Paul speaks of God's fulfilment of His promise in Christ's resurrection, as being 'glad tidings.' 'Glad tidings,' as we know, are only other words for the 'Gospel.' The gospel of the resurrection then, this it was which the apostles had to preach. Christ dying for our sins and raised again for our justification,—forgiveness of sins through a crucified and risen Saviour,—this was the great subject upon which they dwelt.

St. Paul, in his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, shows most clearly that 'by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight.' In his sermon in the synagogue of Antioch his teaching is the same.

And when a man has been made deeply to feel his sinfulness and helplessness—when every attempt to obey God's law leaves him only more and more conscious of his miserable short-comings, is it not truly 'good news' to be told of forgiveness of sins freely given, of a righteousness wrought out by another to be put to his account? '*Forgiveness of sins*;' how greatly do we need it! Let us humbly and earnestly seek it; let us by faith thankfully

accept it. We could not perfectly obey the law, Christ has obeyed for us; *we* could not wipe out our black score of guilt, but Christ by His most precious blood can and does; *we* could not find or fashion a title to heaven, but Christ opens it to all believers. And He says to us, 'Be not afraid, only believe.' It is for us to take Him at His word, to accept all He offers, to rest upon the sufficiency of His atonement, to plead the merits of His death.

Gospel tidings are '*glad*;' '*forgiveness of sins*' is sweet. But there are those who despise or neglect the great salvation. So St. Paul would not close his sermon without a word of solemn caution. If God's great work of mercy were despised, His '*strange work*' of judgment must hold on its awful course. O let none of us '*receive the grace of God in vain*.' The richer the love that saves us, the deeper and darker must be the condemnation of those to whom love calls in vain. 'How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' (Heb. ii. 3.)

ACTS, xiii. 42-52.

42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.

43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

44 And the next sabbath-day came almost the whole city together to heard the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

AMONGST those who heard Paul preach in the synagogue of Antioch there was much interest excited, and a great desire to hear awakened. We are told of Gentiles asking to have the same words preached to them again the next sabbath; of some Jews, and others who, not being originally of Israel, had embraced the Jewish religion, lingering behind the rest of the audience, and following the preacher and his companion, anxious for further instruction;—and finally of a vast multitude collected together the next Sabbath day,—‘*almost the whole city,*’—to hear the word of God.

This anxiety to hear is *something*,—is indeed a *great thing*. Very probably it was curiosity that brought many of these people together. But whatever it was, it was good that they should thus come under the sound of the Gospel. Anything is better than utter stagnation, and that indifference which keeps men even from troubling themselves to hear the word preached. The word may go into men’s ears only and never reach their hearts, but better so than that neither ears nor hearts should be in the way of receiving it.

St. Paul’s sermon at Antioch was only just what we should call a plain Gospel sermon. It dealt

with most elementary truths,— the fulfilment of Old Testament promises in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the offer of forgiveness of sins through Him. Of course an inspired apostle would speak with a power far beyond that of preachers of these days. But the subjects of his sermon are the same as we hear continually. Perhaps it is partly because we are so familiar with Gospel tidings, that they fall so flat on our ears and our hearts. There were days in the history of our own Church and country, when the Gospel was comparatively a new thing, and crowds flocked to hear it. Just one hundred and thirty-four years back, when bishops, and clergy, and people were more or less asleep, good George Whitefield preached the Gospel to thousands. People came many miles to hear him. Not less than thirty thousand were at one time collected for the purpose, and with tears running down the cheeks of many they drank in eagerly the offers of Gospel grace. We ought not to prize the Gospel less because we hear it so often. It will be well for us every now and then to question ourselves as to the result of all our hearing; to ask, ‘Am I any the better for what I hear,—is the word received by me in faith,—is it working effectually on my heart,—or am I ever “learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth,” ever hearing and not even caring to profit.’

There were some hopeful hearers amongst those

who had listened to St. Paul's discourse. And these, really anxious as they appeared for fuller instruction, were earnestly exhorted by the apostles '*to continue in the grace of God.*' Plainly in these there was the beginning of a good work. They at least received the word with joy. They found and felt in the Gospel of Christ something that they wanted. The blessed news of forgiveness of sins through Christ Jesus was to them a welcome sound. And so it may surely be hoped it is, or at least has been at some time or other, with us. But there is such a thing as beginning to run well and being hindered; so Paul and Barnabas did not think it unnecessary to exhort the most hopeful of their hearers to '*continue in the grace of God.*' When the Gospel has lost as it were its novelty for us, we are too apt to fall into a slothful, prayerless way,—taking all for granted, and living as if we thought that without an effort, without watchfulness and diligence, without love,—real, thankful love to Christ,—all may yet come right at last. Let then the exhortation of Paul and Barnabas to those inquiring hearers at Antioch come home to us. Let us remember the words of one greater than the apostles, their Lord and ours, 'If ye continue in my word then are ye my disciples indeed;'—'No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

There were yet hearers of another class at Ar-

tioch. There were amongst the Jews some who '*filled with envy, spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*' True children of those who dared to say of Jesus, 'He casteth out devils through Beelzebub,' they spake against things which were spoken to them for their good; contradicting where they could not disprove, and blaspheming where they knew not how to gain-say. Then it was that Paul and Barnabas, filled with holy indignation, told them that it had been their duty to preach the Gospel first to Israel, but since they rejected it they should now make offers of salvation to the Gentiles; and that in doing so they would only be fulfilling the word of prophecy which spoke of Christ as '*a light of the Gentiles,*' and '*for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*'

Let us bear in mind that the message brought to those Jews was a message of mercy; the offer made to them was one of '*everlasting life.*' Yet, says the apostle, '*ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of it.*' This is just as if a sick man should dash to the ground the only medicine that could cure him,—and the famishing man leave untasted the food that could restore his strength,—and the prisoner fasten again the door which mercy had flung open. Gentiles of these days, as well as Jews of earlier times too often act thus. 'This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life; and this life is in His Son.' (1 John, v. 11.) But

if we do not believe the record, nor believe in Him of whom the record tells, what is this but '*putting from us*' the eternal life which Jesus offers? What is it but '*putting from us*' life, peace, hope, happiness, heaven?

Other hearers yet are spoken of; Gentiles, who '*were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord*;' and of these it is added, '*as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*' These words are sometimes misunderstood. They seem at first sight as if they meant, 'those who were beforehand appointed of God to obtain eternal life' believed. But this is not the real meaning of the words. The word translated '*ordained*' means '*disposed for*,'—'*set upon*,'—'*seriously minded to obtain*' eternal life. The same word is used in chap. xx. v. 13, where it is said Paul '*went afoot to Assos, for so he was disposed or minded.*' It is the same word as is here rendered '*ordained.*'

This then is the plain question for us, 'Do we wish to have eternal life? Are we minded to obtain it? Are we honest when we say that we wish for pardon now and heaven hereafter?' O may that be true of us which St. Paul afterwards said of himself and the Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote, 'We are not of them that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.' (Heb. x. 39.)

ACTS, xiv. 1-7.

1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them,

6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

7 And there they preached the gospel.

LET us go back for a moment to the closing verses of the last chapter. We saw the effect produced on the minds of different classes of hearers by St. Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch. Satan never sees good being done without stirring up opposition. 'The strong man armed' keeps his goods in peace as long as he can; it is when 'the

stronger than he' comes upon him that the stir and strife begin.

And it is really curious to observe what very different parties are spoken of in the course of a few verses, as combining in the work of opposition and persecution. Thus we have '*devout and honourable women*,' '*chief men of the city*,' '*unbelieving Jews*,' '*rulers*' of the Jews, and a most strange and unusual combination of Jews and Gentiles (something like the friendship which sprang up between Herod and Pilate, founded only upon a common enmity to Christ),—all these in one way or another endeavouring to hinder and defeat the work of the preachers of the Gospel. After what their Master had said to His disciples whilst He was yet with them, all this could not have seemed 'a strange thing.' He had expressly told His followers that the world which hated and persecuted Him would also hate and persecute them; that He had 'not come to send peace on earth, but a sword.' What we have to learn from it all is, that we must not be startled and discouraged if we meet with opposition and ill-will in our own Christian course, or in our efforts to lead others to Christ. We must expect difficulties and hindrances. If we see in a stream the water eddying and foaming we know that it has met with some obstacle; when the stream flows on smoothly it is because nothing obstructs its course. So those who preach the Gospel, and those who con-

sistently live according to it, are like barriers in the way of the stream of utter worldliness that flows around them. There is likely to be a stir connected with such. We need not court opposition, but we must not be frightened at it. It is a sign that something is being done; and Jesus said to His disciples, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' (John, xvi. 33.)

Acting upon the Lord's command, 'If they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another,' the apostles fled first from Antioch, and then subsequently from Iconium. But wherever they went, their work was still the same. Not daunted, not silenced, by opposition, persecution, peril, they '*published the word of the Lord,*' and '*spake boldly in the Lord,*' preaching '*the word of his grace,*'—'*the Gospel*' of Christ. Plainly these preachers of the Gospel reckoned it a most important duty, a high honour, a blessed privilege to go about everywhere, even at the risk of their lives, telling men of the great salvation wrought out for them, and offered to them by Christ. Can we wonder at this? It was good news that they had to tell, and it is commonly almost as pleasant to *tell* good news as to *hear* them.

Let us just think for a moment what was the substance of that 'word of God's grace' which the apostles preached. It was much like this; they would say to their hearers, 'You are sinners exposed to God's wrath, yet God has made gracious

provision for your forgiveness; you are by nature far off from God, yet He bids you draw nigh and be at peace with Him; you are unable to obey God's law, but Christ has obeyed it for you; you are impure, but God offers you His Spirit to make you holy; you are dying creatures, but life and immortality are brought to light in the Gospel, and are offered to you; on earth you are but strangers and pilgrims,—in heaven you may have an abiding home. Then be not afraid, only believe. Take what Christ offers; make trial of His love. Your sins, your shortcomings, your broken promises, all your sad burden of guilt,—bring them, and leave them at the foot of the Redeemer's cross; knowing and believing that *for you* 'with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him plenteous redemption.'

Now surely when men are charged and commissioned to say such good things as these, they may well 'speak boldly.' And '*boldly*' did the apostles speak. If they fled when 'an assault was made,' and rulers and people were on the point of stoning them, it was from no faithless cowardice. They only obeyed their Lord's own instructions; and still wherever they went they carried the glad tidings of salvation.

One great secret of their courage, faithfulness, and success, was this; they were '*filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost.*' Christ had told His disciples to 'rejoice and be exceeding glad when persecuted,'

and so they did. It sounds strange; persecution,—expulsion,—flight,—danger,—side by side with ‘joy.’ But these words explain it all; ‘they were filled with the Holy Ghost.’ The Holy Spirit was *with* them,—*in* them, as a spirit of wisdom, power, and holy joy. Their hearts were lifted up above earthly cares and troubles. As their ‘sufferings abounded, their consolations did much more abound.’

St. Paul, some twenty years after this, writing to the Ephesians, bids them to be ‘filled with the Spirit.’ He knew what it was to be so filled himself. He knew the joy and peace (even in the midst of tribulation) which flow from it.

For ourselves, if we want boldness to confess Christ before men,—strength to withstand temptation and opposition,—peace in trouble,—joy in sorrow,—hope in death; we must earnestly seek the Holy Spirit’s light, and teaching, and guidance. Preachers need His help to enable them to preach to any good purpose; hearers need it to enable them to hear so as to profit. What we all alike need, let us humbly but earnestly ask of Him, ‘who giveth liberally and upbraideth not,’ and ‘it shall be given’ us.

ACTS, xiv. 8-10.

8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked :

9 The same heard Paul speak : who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

THERE always have been, and no doubt always will be, men who love to doubt, and cavil, and try to explain away miracles, by ascribing them to mere natural causes.

To meet such cavillers, we have here and there in the Bible miracles recorded in which there could be no possible *pretence* of anything which happened out of the common way being the result of natural causes. Thus our Lord gave sight to a man '*born blind*;' Peter and John healed a man '*lame from his mother's womb*,'—a life-long, helpless cripple. And so in the verses which we have just read ; it was a poor cripple '*who never had walked*,' that was healed by St. Paul at Lystra. Even if any should vainly and foolishly reason that to heal a lame man, or give

sight to a blind man, in an instant, at a word or a touch, was what might sometimes be done by medical skill or other known means, at least this could not be pretended in cases where there had never been at any time the power to walk or to see. To give a sense *never once possessed*,—to give powers *never once enjoyed*,—this at least all must acknowledge must be of God alone.

It seems as if the poor cripple of Lystra had some interest in what St. Paul preached. From the way in which he is spoken of, it seems as if his attention was caught by the apostle's words. He was not so much taken up with his own ailments, as not to listen eagerly to the preaching of the Gospel.

Whilst he was thus listening, St. Paul (given a supernatural power of discerning spirits) '*perceived that he had faith to be healed.*' He saw that when bidden to stand upright, the man would not begin to argue and question,—would not say, 'it is useless for me to try and do what all men know is impossible,'—but making the attempt to rise, would feel sudden strength coming into his helpless limbs and start up a new man, able to do what he had never yet done. We may remember that our Lord again and again tried, and rewarded, the faith of those whom He relieved. Two blind men once followed Him, crying, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.' And Jesus said unto them (when He knew that they wished their sight restored), 'Believe ye

that I am able to do this?' They said unto Him, 'Yea, Lord.' Then touched He their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it unto you.' And their eyes were opened. Again, to an afflicted father seeking relief for a child tormented with an unclean spirit, Jesus said, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.' And so in other instances.

And does not all this remind us of that saying of the apostle Paul (Heb. xi. 6), 'Without faith it is impossible to please Him (*i.e.* God), for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' St. Paul bade a helpless cripple at Antioch stand upright. Similarly to us, spiritually weak and helpless as we are, come such commands as these—'Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead;' 'Come out, and be separated from an evil world;' 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' We are apt sometimes to look at such precepts with a feeling of something like despair; such a feeling as that poor cripple might have had when Paul bade him stand, had he not possessed the precious gift of faith. 'I cannot break through bad habits; cannot give up besetting sins; cannot persevere in my heavenward course; cannot walk in newness of life;' such are too often our secret feelings. And such feelings make us fall back into a kind of listless helplessness,—very pleasing to the tempter, very

hurtful to our own souls, very grieving to the Spirit of God. We ought rather to reason thus, 'God would not bid me do anything which He would not help and enable me to do; *I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me*: if He bids me to stand upright, He will give me power to do so; if He bids me to run, He draws; if He warns me to resist the devil, He will beat Him down under my feet; if He charges me to work out my salvation, He engages to work *in and with me*.' It is for us, not to cavil, to question, to argue, but to believe and obey. Had we more of that poor cripple's simple faith how would our soul's sicknesses be healed; with what new strength and happy courage should we run the way of God's commandments!

It is said of the poor man whom Paul addressed, that at the apostle's bidding '*he leaped and walked*.' It was like the case of the lame man healed by Peter and John at the beautiful gate of the temple, when new strength and new powers were given, he could not be content to show and exercise them in a common way. He sprang up strong and whole, and bounding with joy, showed how perfect was the miracle of mercy wrought upon him. Let the 'word of faith' which comes to us in the Gospel be received with more entire and unquestioning faith, and we too shall be enabled to go forward joyfully, hopefully, towards heaven.

ACTS, xiv. 11-18.

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter ; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things ? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein :

16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

It was perfectly plain to the people of Lystra that a ' notable miracle ' had been wrought amongst them, in the healing of one who had been well

known as a helpless cripple. Much wiser and better reasoners than many of our professedly wise men of these days, they could only ascribe the wonder to Divine power. But their ideas of God were very dark and confused. They had some tales amongst them of their deities having appeared at times in that region, and so exclaimed, '*The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.*' As Paul was the chief speaker they called him 'Mercury,' and Barnabas they called 'Jupiter.' And then, as there was a temple of Jupiter just outside the city, the priest of this temple brought oxen and garlands, and prepared to do sacrifice with the people.

Now was the time, if Paul and Barnabas had been desirous of earthly honour, for them to have made much of themselves, and, if they did not represent themselves as divine, at least to have taken credit to themselves for what had lately happened. These men of God felt and acted in a very different way. Rending their clothes in token of their horror, the apostles rushed in amongst the people, exclaiming, '*Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein.*' In St. Paul's address to these idolaters of Lystra we cannot help being struck with the great wisdom with which, here as elsewhere, the apostle suited his discourse to his

audience. These people were ignorant of the very first elements of religion. They knew nothing of the very nature of a God. Accordingly, St. Paul began by speaking of the witness given by nature to the living and true God. 'We,' he said, 'are not gods as ye vainly imagine, but weak men of like passions and infirmities with yourselves; and we come preaching to you, that you should turn from dumb idols which cannot profit and deliver, for they are vain, to the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things therein. He *'in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways;'* or, as the same apostle has it in a very similar sermon addressed to the men of Athens, 'The times of this ignorance God winked at.' God, that is, did not by any visible judgment, or direct revelation given to the *whole* world, interfere to put a stop to human errors and wickedness. Yet it must not be thought that God left Himself in those times of comparative darkness with nothing to testify of Him,—nothing to tell of His power and goodness. There were witnesses for Him in the works of His hands, and the appointments of His Providence.

'*Rain from heaven and fruitful seasons.*' There is a witness for God in the little rain-drop. 'He maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof; which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.' 'He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or

for his land, or for mercy.' (Job, xxxvi. 27, 28, and xxxvii. 13.) God can save or punish, deliver or destroy, by small means as well as great; by instruments which seem trifling and insignificant, as well as by those which seem great and powerful. When He would punish proud Pharaoh, he employed frogs, lice, flies, locusts, creatures so small and mean as His ministers of vengeance. God by the prophet Joel speaks of His 'great army;' and by this He means, as we find, not angels and heavenly powers, but the locust, the canker-worm, the caterpillar, and palmer-worm. Whatever God is pleased to employ becomes at once great and important. And thus it is as to the '*rain from heaven.*' If no rain fell, day after day, month after month, for a long season, all would at last be barrenness and desolation. On the other hand, only let the little, gentle rain-drop fall incessantly for many weeks, and it becomes a dropping curse,—all our labour is thrown away,—all our hopes are blasted. Rain withholden for three years, in answer to a prophet's prayer, brought a famine for the punishment of guilty Israel; rain granted again in answer to the same prophet's petition, restored plenty. We cry out in fear if *too much* rain comes, or if *none* comes, for we know well what will be the sad consequences; but we are too apt to forget that when just *enough* comes—comes *as* we want it and *when* we want it—this is a witness for God, a token of the bounty and loving-

kindness of Him who 'sendeth rain on the just and unjust.'

And so as to '*fruitful seasons.*' After the flood God promised that 'whilst the earth remained, seed-time and harvest, day and night, summer and winter should not cease.' And as He promised, so it is. Seasons run their accustomed round ; harvest follows seed-time ; night succeeds day ; winds blow and showers fall ; and all goes on so smoothly and steadily that few ever stop to think of the Hand that guides and orders all. The least break in the order,—long drought, blasting winds, excessive rain,—make men uneasy, and at last bring them to God's house to humble themselves before Him and to cry for relief.

But we should remember that it is not only seasons of dearth which tell of God's anger on account of sin that witness of Him ; '*fruitful seasons,*' too, when our garners are full of all manner of store, have a voice bidding us to praise and honour Him.

If we were unfallen and innocent, the witness given for God by creation and Providence would be sufficient for us. For then we should have eyes to see God's wisdom, goodness, and power in all that *lives*, and *moves*, and *is*. But we are fallen, guilty, unclean. We need pardon and cleansing. We need other, better, clearer witness than that of creation. We *need* it, and we *have* it. 'This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is

in his Son.' God has 'not left himself without witness in given us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons;' but He has provided in addition a better, higher witness of Himself in giving His Son to die for us. Let us not dare to 'make God a liar' by refusing to 'believe the record that God hath given of his Son.' (1 John, v. 10, 11.)

ACTS, xiv. 19-22.

19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

It was with difficulty that Paul and Barnabas kept back the people of Lystra from offering sacrifice to them, as if they were gods. In a very little time, however, the scene was altogether changed. There came Jews from Antioch and Iconium, sorely troubled at the success granted to the preachers of the Gospel in those places, and determined if possible to prevent such success elsewhere, and so stirred up the people that they rose up against Paul and stoned him, and drew his body, supposing him to be dead, out of the city. One day they are ready to

sacrifice to a man as if he were a god; the next they stone him as if he were the vilest of malefactors! It was with the servant as it had been with his Divine Master before him. One day 'Hosannah'—the next 'Crucify him.' So changeable and inconstant is man! Let us not miss the lesson thus taught us. Men may speak well of us and flatter us one day,—let us not be unduly exalted, very different sounds may be heard to-morrow. They may reproach and revile us one hour,—let us not be unduly cast down, all this may be changed the next. 'With me,' said St. Paul, 'it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: he that judgeth me is the Lord.' (1Cor. iv. 3, 4.) *Worshipped* one day, *stoned* the next, St. Paul only presents a sample of the treatment that Christ's ministers and Christ's people must look for in this changeful world.

Though stoned, St. Paul was not at this time killed. He was miraculously preserved, for he was dragged out of the city as if dead. And plainly his sorrowing and affectionate friends stood around what they thought to be his dead body, lamenting the loss of their guide and teacher. To their astonishment and joy he rose up alive. He had yet more to do and to suffer for Christ, and

'Man is immortal till his work is done.'

This was the occasion to which the apostle refers in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians, when in the

list of his labours and sufferings he includes this, 'Once was I stoned.' (1 Cor. xi. 25.)

Surely that stoning in the streets of Lystra must have brought back sadly and forcibly to the mind of the apostle a scene in which about thirteen years before he had taken a leading part, when he kept the clothes of those who stoned holy Stephen, and stood by 'consenting unto his death.' The martyr's calm resolution,—his smile of holy triumph,—his prayer for his murderers,—his peaceful departure,—how all this must have come back upon St. Paul's mind as the stones were falling thickly upon him. Much had passed since Stephen's death. The persecutor had become a preacher of the faith which he once sought to destroy. Paul was a happier man by far when being stoned than when aiding in the stoning of one of Christ's chosen ones. Stephen was right after all, and Paul had found it so.

'*The next day Paul departed with Barnabas to Derbe.*' And there (not in the smallest measure daunted and discouraged by what had lately happened) they preached the Gospel and made many disciples. Then after a short time thus spent they came back again to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, the very places where a few months before they had met with such ill-usage. The determined perseverance of these men in preaching the Gospel of Christ makes us feel how precious, how mighty for pulling down the strongholds of Satan, *that*

must be for which they were content to run such risks and to make such sacrifices. We should prize the Gospel more if we knew better our real condition of danger, need, and sinfulness. May God show us what we *are*, that we may reckon that word more sweet which tells us what through Christ we may become, even children of light and heirs of glory!

The work of those faithful apostles consisted not only in preaching the Gospel to those to whom its tidings were quite new. Where they had sown good seed already there they came afterwards to water it. They came amongst those who were already disciples; '*confirming their souls and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*' There was much to shake and try the faith of converts in those days. They had to pass through many a fiery trial; they had to withstand many a strong temptation. It was therefore needful that the preachers of the Gospel should exhort them to hold on and hold fast; to continue in the faith; and not to think it a strange thing happening unto them if they should meet with fiery trials, for that tribulation of some kind must be, more or less, the portion of all God's people.

The days in which the apostles lived were, no doubt, days of special trial. *Then* in an especial manner those who would 'live godly in Christ

Jesus' must expect to 'suffer persecution.' St. Paul did not try to keep back the truth from his converts. He would not speak 'smooth things' to them. He did not paint the way to heaven as lying amidst songs, and flowers, and sunshine. It leads (he taught) through many a thorny thicket,—up many a rugged steep. In like manner Jesus plainly told His disciples what to expect. 'In the world,' He said, 'ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' And we must not think that, in these days of ours, the offence of the cross has altogether ceased; that the way to heaven lies no longer through tribulation. It is still true as ever, that

'The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the world where sorrow is unknown.'

There are, as we all know, an infinite variety of faces and features amongst men. No two faces are exactly alike; neither are any two minds exactly alike. There is, then, an infinite variety of trials through which Christians have to pass. The 'heart' of each 'knoweth its own bitterness.' There are griefs and sorrows peculiar to each of us.

'Not e'en the tenderest heart, and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile or sigh.'

Only let none of us expect wholly to escape tribulation. God lets us suffer and struggle that we may

feel our weakness and come to Him for strength,—that we may not settle down, heart and soul, hopes and affections, in this world as if it were our final home,—that we may look and long for something better,—that we may prize more the Gospel which brings life and immortality to light, and the Saviour who died to procure us joy and glory. And if only we—weak, sinful, suffering, dying creatures as we are—lay hold on Christ by faith, and cling to Him, and put our souls in His hands, we may take up St. Paul's words and say, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution; or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' (Rom. viii. 35–37.)

ACTS, xiv. 23-28.

23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.

26 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia :

26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.

PAUL and Barnabas, having strengthened and encouraged the hearts of the disciples in the churches of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and prepared them to expect trials and so not to sink under them, felt called upon to go forward on their missionary journey to other parts. However, before leaving those so lately called by their labours into the Church of Christ, they thought it needful to provide for their future supervision and instruction. They, therefore,

with prayer and fasting, ordained elders in every church, who should teach and feed the sheep of Christ's flock. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians says, that when Christ 'ascended up on high,' He 'gave gifts unto men;' 'he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.' (Eph. iv. 8, 11, 12.) Although it was through the preaching of the apostles that the Christians of those different churches had been brought into Christ's fold, they would need, when those first teachers were removed, a settled ministry. So Paul and Barnabas did just what afterwards Paul instructed Titus to do in Crete, when he wrote thus to him, 'For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee.' (Tit. i. 5.)

The word translated 'elders' is just the same as 'presbyters,' and in our common use we shorten the word 'presbyter' into 'priest.' So when we use the word 'priest,' if we understand it rightly, we ought not to have in our minds any idea of one who sacrifices, like the Jewish priests of old time; nor should we think of a priest, as Romanists do, as of a man who has some mysterious power of absolving sin, anointing the dying, and changing the elements of bread and wine into the body and blood

of Christ. A 'priest' in these days is simply 'a presbyter,' 'an elder,' and as such a preacher of the Gospel. But the minister's office, call him what we may, is a very important and difficult one. And he needs all the help that the prayers of his people can give him. We should regard the ministry as God's appointment. We should receive ministers as Christ's gifts to His Church; but we should never forget to pray that they may be kept humble, watchful, faithful, and never suffered in any way to bring a reproach upon the Gospel of Christ.

Having made all necessary arrangements, the apostles passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia, and there having preached in Perga, they went down to the sea-coast to Attalia, and thence sailed back to Antioch in Syria, from whence (as we read in the beginning of chapter xiii.) they had been commissioned and sent forth for the work which had been so successfully accomplished.

'And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.' A missionary journey had just been completed; and this gathering together of the Christians was a missionary meeting, at which was presented a missionary report.

There was no kind of difficulty about gathering the Church together to hear what was to be told; no risk of having 'a bad meeting,' as we should call

it. Love was then warm ; zeal was active. It gave those early Christians real joy to hear of the triumphs of the Gospel and the extension of Christ's kingdom. In our days it is not always thus. Perhaps some faithful missionary who has been labouring for years, in the midst of many privations, in foreign lands, comes amongst us and tells us of fresh doors opened for the preaching of the Gospel,—of poor heathens flinging away their idols,—of Bibles translated for the first time into strange tongues,—of the cross of Christ winning its glorious way amongst tribes long sitting in darkness. And when he come thus and tells his story truthfully and thankfully, it is often a hard matter to get together more than a handful of people to hear him.

If the subjects discussed at missionary meetings were corn, crops, cattle, emigration, politics, we should see good attendances. But when the talk is about the salvation of souls,—about the overthrow of Satan's kingdom,—about hope and happiness coming into many a heart that has long been dark and hopeless,—then it seems as if 'all with one consent began to make excuse.' One says he is too busy ; another can tell of some friend that has been to distant parts and come back again and never saw a missionary, and never heard of any good done by one (forgetting all the while that those who do not search and inquire are not likely to know what is

going on); another is secretly afraid lest his feelings should be wrought upon by what he hears, and so he may be guilty of the extravagance of casting his pound, or shilling, or penny, as the case may be, into God's treasury; and many more do not care, nor even pretend to care, whether souls are saved or lost,—whether Christ or the devil triumphs,—whether men's woes are lightened by the blessed Gospel of the grace of God, or they are burdened *here* and ruined *hereafter* by unrepented and unforgiven sin.

Angels judge of such matters very differently. They look down with deep anxiety; not on crowns won and kingdoms vanquished; with them there is 'joy over *one* sinner that repenteth,' though that one be found amongst those whom men despise or pity. And we, too, should judge differently if we only realized more the worth of our own souls,—the danger of sin,—the love of Christ,—the greatness and the nearness of eternity. We are not as deeply interested as we ought to be about our own salvation, so it is not to be wondered at that we are cold about the salvation of others. May we have more of the mind of Christ, and feel more as He felt, act more as He acted. He came 'not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many;' 'came to seek and to save that which was lost.' Oh, could we but feel at all as we ought

to feel the love of that dear Saviour to our poor lost souls, surely we should long to make Him known to others.

‘ Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly dove,
With all thy quickening powers,
Come, shed abroad a Saviour’s love,
And that shall kindle ours !’

ACTS, xv. 1-11.

1 And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees, which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us ;

9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear ?

11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

IN reading these verses we must bear in mind that for many ages, there was one chosen nation, to whom had been committed the oracles of God,—who had the covenants of promise, the Jewish nation. If any Gentile wished for spiritual light, he could only obtain it by becoming a Jew. So then the first idea of the Jewish Christians was, that the religion of Jesus Christ was only an addition to Judaism, and that a Gentile becoming a Christian must pass through a Jewish training, and must conform to Jewish ceremonies.

When therefore the Gentiles began to be gathered in larger numbers into the Church, it was no great wonder that there should come amongst them some who insisted upon the believing Gentiles at Antioch being '*circumcised after the manner of Moses,*' as essential to salvation. This led to much '*dissension and disputation ;*' and at last, to settle the question, it was decided that Paul and Barnabas, with some other brethren, should go up to Jerusalem to consult the apostles and elders about it. They set out accordingly (accompanied for a portion of their journey by some members of the Church), and

as they travelled left great joy amongst the companies of Christians whom they visited, by declaring the conversion of the Gentiles.

At length Jerusalem was reached; and the matter laid before the Church. The appointed deputation told of the success which God had granted to their ministry,—and of the large ingathering of Gentiles; adding, however, that trouble had been caused by the demand of some of the brethren, that the new converts should be circumcised according to the law of Moses.

A solemn assembly was called; and St. Peter told how God had made choice of him as the means by which the Gentile centurion, Cornelius, and his friends, had been gathered into the household of faith. He spoke of '*God which knoweth the hearts,*' giving to Gentiles as well as Jews, on their believing the Gospel record, the witness of the Spirit '*sealing them unto the day of redemption,*' and '*purifying their hearts by faith.*' If the same good work was wrought *in the hearts, and on the lives,* of Jews and Gentiles alike;—if the same fruits of the Spirit were manifested by both alike;—the same blessings offered to both;—the same hopes entertained by both;—how plain and happy was the conclusion to be drawn, viz., that the middle wall of partition was now broken down, and that through one Mediator, Christ Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles had access by one Spirit to the Father. (Eph. ii. 18.)

To us, perhaps, all this discussion about circumcision and the observance of the law of Moses, may seem of no interest and importance. St. Paul, however, as we may see from his Epistles, did not think it so. In his eyes insisting upon circumcision and the keeping of the ceremonial law, would be like saying, that the work of Christ for our salvation was not complete without the addition of outward observance or human merit.

And in this way the Gospel would be made void. For a half Saviour is no Saviour at all. A salvation which is partly of man is no salvation. All must be of God or nothing. In the fifth and sixth chapters of his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul speaks very clearly and strongly on this question. If a man (he there teaches us) after the coming of Christ,—after the working out of our redemption,—after the full proclamation of the Gospel,—if a man after all this would be circumcised, he ‘is a debtor to do the whole law.’ He puts himself under the law, not only as a rule of life, but also as a means of justification. To him therefore the message comes, ‘Do this and thou shalt live,’—‘Fulfil the whole law and thou shalt be saved,’—and so he is ‘fallen from grace,’—‘Christ is of no effect to him.’ He claims life as the reward of obedience, instead of looking for it as the free gift of God’s grace. And as we know that no man *does*, or *can*, or ever *will*, perfectly fulfil the law, the way of life is closed

against him, on the one side by an imperfect obedience, and on the other by the proud unbelief which will not receive salvation as God's free gift alone.

The provisions of the Levitical law were very useful for a time. They were as the *scaffolding* of the great building of Christ's Church afterwards to be reared; they were *types* of future blessings,—*shadows* of good things to come,—‘*figures* for the time then present, but not the very image of the things.’ And most thankful indeed may we well be, that we are relieved from such ‘a yoke of bondage,’—that *everywhere* we may worship the Father,—that we have the Gospel of God's grace plainly preached to us,—that with simplicity of worship, although ‘with reverence and godly fear,’ we may draw near to God.

But let us not overlook that expression of St. Peter's, ‘*purifying their hearts by faith.*’ The words remind us, that a genuine faith is one which bears good fruit. Just as St. John says of a Christian *hope*, that he who has it ‘purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure;’—so a Christian *faith* has a purifying, sanctifying effect on the heart and life. And a faith which makes no difference in a man,—which leaves his heart as full of evil thoughts as ever,—which allows him to remain as worldly, and selfish, and useless as ever; such a faith is dead and worthless; it is not such as God will accept; it is not such as will bring us peace and safety at the last.

'We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.' Do we not often use the words 'saved,'—'a Saviour,'—'salvation,'—without thinking as we ought of their real meaning? We know well enough what we mean when we speak of being saved from fire, or shipwreck, or dangerous sickness. But let us keep it well in mind that Jesus saves us from 'the wrath to come,'—'the second death.' Let us think what it cost Him to work out our salvation. Let us remember that being saved from death means being raised to life and glory. And if the salvation wrought out for us and offered to us be so great,—great in its *object*,—great in its *author*,—great in its *execution*,—great in its *consequences*,—let us take good heed lest we 'neglect' it; let us remember that we are 'saved and called with a holy calling;' that we might show forth His praise, who hath 'called us out of darkness to His marvellous light.' (1 Pet. ii. 9.)

ACTS, xv. 12-35.

12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me :

14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets ; as it is written,

16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down ; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up :

17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.

18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.

19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God :

20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

22 Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch

with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren :

23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia :

24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law : to whom we gave no such commandment :

25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things ;

29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication : from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch : and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle :

31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

AFTER Peter had given the advice contained in

the last verses of this chapter which we read, Paul and Barnabas were called upon to tell the result of their labours amongst the Gentiles, on their late missionary journey. So, amidst the attentive silence of the assembly, first one, and then the other told of miracles wrought, converts gathered in, and churches founded through their instrumentality.

Then, when their report was ended, James (the son of Alphæus) arose and asked for the attention of the audience. He referred to what Peter had just said, as to his being employed to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and said that in this fact he saw a fulfilment of the words of the prophet Amos, who, after speaking of the building up of the Jewish Church, had added a prediction also about the gathering in of the Gentiles. So here again, as we have seen before, we have the Old Testament referred to. We saw how St. Peter, St. Paul, and Stephen, took texts for their discourses out of the Old Testament. Here St. James does the same. Let it then again remind us how both Old and New Testaments are parts of one and the same book. The Old prepares us for the New; the New lights up the Old.

'Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.' It is plain that St. James means, that all God's dealings as regards the calling in of Jews or Gentiles; the time *when*, and the manner *in which*, the Gospel should be preached to

them,—all was according to a long-settled plan. All was laid down, and mapped out before God's eye ages back; all arranged and done in the best way and at the fittest time. This thought ought to silence all our vain questionings and doubts. If we could but see, as God sees, the whole plan of divine Providence *at once*, we should see perfect wisdom guiding the whole,—one part fitting exactly into another,—one time a time of preparation for what is to follow.

The conclusion to which St. James came, as to the position and duties of the Gentile converts on the points discussed, was this; that they should *abstain from pollutions of idols (i.e., from meats offered to them), and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*' This conclusion was agreed in by the whole council, and Paul and Barnabas, together with Judas and Silas, were appointed to carry to the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, letters announcing the decision arrived at.

Of the things forbidden in that decision some were evidently forbidden for the sake of peace and charity; such as eating things offered to idols and things strangled. It was important (as the law of Moses was read in the synagogues every Sabbath) that nothing should be needlessly done to shock the prejudices of the Jews, and hurt their feelings.

One matter, however, named in that decree of

the council of Jerusalem, was no question of peace and charity only. Sins of uncleanness had been very lightly thought of amongst the Gentiles, and this must be so no longer. They were called 'not to uncleanness but to holiness;' they must put off the old man which was corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man in purity and holiness of life. We know how very plainly and strongly the apostle Paul speaks in all his epistles on these points, especially in those to the Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. And we with all our light and privileges,—all our long habits of hearing and reading God's word,—*we* need to be reminded of the strong and solemn admonitions of the apostle on these points. 'Let no man,' he says, 'deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience,' (Eph. v. 6.) As though he had said, 'Let no man try to persuade you that sins of sensual indulgence are sins of small moment,—excusable weaknesses,—sins common to very many, and therefore to be winked at. Let no one try to cloke and cover them by false words about being 'a little gay,'—'loving good fellowship,'—and so on. Be assured that such sins are deadly as well as defiling. On account of these very things 'cometh the wrath of God' upon those who indulge in them; 'be not ye therefore partakers with them.'

When the letter from the apostles and elders

was read in the Church of Antioch, we read that '*they rejoiced for the consolation.*' They were relieved by it from the fear of being subjected to burdensome rites and ceremonies, to which they had not been accustomed, and which they did not understand. They were set free to 'rejoice in Christ Jesus' without having or seeking 'confidence in the flesh.' They were taught that the Saviour preached to them was a complete and sufficient Saviour, and that if they did but confess Him with their mouths, and believe in Him with their hearts, they should be saved.

To us too the Gospel, if rightly received, will surely bring joy and 'consolation,'—ease of conscience,—peace of mind. And let us not forget that the evidence of having rightly received it lies, in our endeavouring to live 'soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;' 'cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting (or at the least humbly and prayerfully striving to do so) holiness in the fear of the Lord,' (2 Cor. vii. 1.)

ACTS, xv. 36-41.

36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other : and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus ;

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

PAUL and Barnabas being agreed as to the expediency of a journey, to inquire into the spiritual condition of those amongst whom they had preached the word of the Lord, the question arose as to who should be their companions and helpers. Barnabas wished to take Mark with them. Now Mark was

his nephew, and there was of course nothing unnatural in his wishing to have his relative as a fellow-labourer in the ministry. Paul hesitated about taking him because he had '*departed* from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.' In chapter twelve we have the account of Mark's going forth upon the work of the ministry with Paul and Barnabas; and in the next chapter we are told of his leaving them, and returning to Jerusalem. Mark's mother lived at Jerusalem; and from the way in which St. Paul regarded his departure, and the terms in which that departure is spoken of by St. Luke, we seem to gather that there was some want of zeal on Mark's part,—a little unwillingness to leave home and friends for Christ's sake,—a little shrinking from the dangers and difficulties of missionary work. If, however, Mark failed (or seemed to fail) on this occasion in devotedness, we have plenty to show that he was a most faithful servant of Christ and preacher of His Gospel. The Gospel which bears His name, written about ten years after this, shows what sort of man he was. St. Paul too, himself, in his second Epistle to Timothy, writes thus, 'Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.' It was not then because Mark was not *ordinarily* a good and faithful minister of Christ that St. Paul hesitated to take him with them when visit-

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ing the churches. It was only because on a former missionary journey he had seemed somewhat wanting in zeal and self-denial, and the apostle would have no one who was not, like himself, heart and soul in the work of the Lord. It may have been that Paul was a little too *severe*, and Barnabas a little too *partial*. However it may be, '*the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other.*'

One thing that strikes us in this account is the perfect honesty of the Bible,—the truth and candour with which it draws even the best of men, as they really *are*, with all their faults and infirmities, as well as with all their good qualities. The histories of Noah, Abraham, Lot, David, Elijah, Hezekiah, Peter, and others, are all examples of this. When human authors describe persons whose characters they admire, they generally leave out every blemish. So does not the Bible, which is simple, unvarnished truth. It is a book not for angels, but for poor, sinful, struggling men and women, fighting their way to heaven through fears and temptations; and it would discourage such, if the life of every servant of God mentioned in the Bible was drawn as simply perfect.

Only let no one take occasion to sin from the slips and falls of God's servants. They are written 'for our admonition,' as St. Paul says, to teach

‘him that thinketh he standeth to take heed lest he fall.’ In almost every instance we see some heavy chastisement showing God’s displeasure at His servant’s sin, and deep repentance on their part showing what a bitter thing they found it to go astray. And that we may not be without one perfect pattern for our imitation, we have set before us ‘the man Christ Jesus,’—a true man, with a man’s infirmities, but spotless, faultless, pure, and holy, ‘the chiefest among ten thousand, the altogether lovely.’

Moreover we ought to notice that the contention between Paul and Barnabas did not arise from any low earthly motives; it was not a dispute which of them should be greatest. They were both of them influenced by the best and highest motives; both had in view God’s glory, and the extension of Christ’s kingdom. If they erred, it was from zeal for God, and not from self-interest and self-esteem. What is almost always at the bottom of our disputes and dissensions? Self; and not zeal for God’s service, love to Christ, and care for the salvation of souls. If we never fell out except for such reasons as made Paul and Barnabas differ, O how many wretched quarrels would never arise, how many heart-burnings would be quenched!

This disagreement between Paul and Barnabas was settled in the best and wisest way. Just as, long before, when there was a dispute between the

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servants of Abraham and Lot, 'Abraham said unto Lot, Let there be no strife between me and thee, for we are brethren; is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand I will go to the left.' (Gen. xiii. 9.) So now; Barnabas will have Mark with him,—let it be so,—there is room and work for them. Paul cannot see it to be right, then let him take Silas, and work elsewhere with him. 'If two of God's servants cannot see things alike, let them agree to see things differently.'* They may work in different ways, and yet have one aim. And the time comes when all differences shall vanish, and all be one in love and praise.

We see in the story before us, how God makes even the failings of His servants to work out His wise and gracious purposes. Out of evil He brings good. For the separation between these two preachers of the Gospel only doubled the good work done. Barnabas took Mark, and sailed with him to Cyprus (his own country) to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in the midst of heathen darkness. Paul took Silas, and, being affectionately '*recommended by the brethren to the grace of God, went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the Churches.*' So all ended well; and

* I owe this, and several of the thoughts in this Reading, to Dr. Vaughan, 'The Church of the Gentiles.'

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even that infirmity which proved the two apostles imperfect at best, was made to promote the glory of God, and the growth of Christ's kingdom. Happy indeed will it be for us if we never dispute except as to the best way of serving God, and winning souls for Christ; happy if we follow Paul and Barnabas as they followed Christ!

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